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# A GRASS WIDOW



BY THE  
AUTHOR OF  
THE  
CRACK OF DOOM

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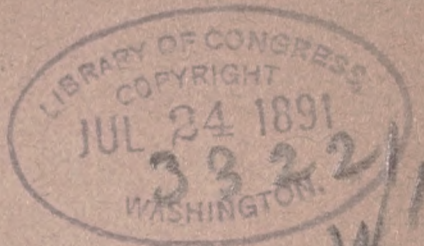
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MAYFAIR SERIES.



A

# GRASS WIDOW

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE CRACK OF DOOM."

*Wm. Minto.*



EDWARD BRANDUS & CO.,  
NEW YORK.



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A GRASS WIDOW







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# A GRASS WIDOW.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A MEDICAL CONFIDENCE.

I FIRST heard of Mrs. Laura Ingers from a fashionable city doctor. He did not, of course, outrage the obligations of professional secrecy by disclosing her name to me, but he excited my interest in a patient whom he did not name, and unwittingly said enough to enable me to discover to whom he referred. It came about in this way.

After a University career of no particular distinction, I had made a desperate effort, and, with the aid of a skilful coach, succeeded in winning a humble place in the Civil Service. Now it so happened that Doctor X. (I will disguise his identity under this letters) was a native of the parish of which my uncle was minister; and when I went up to London to begin my duties



in the Education Office, my uncle conceived it to be for my advantage to send me furnished with an introduction to the great physician, and to bespeak his kind offices for me. A more courteous or kind-hearted man than Doctor X. does not live; he sent for me very soon after my arrival, gave me heaps of good advice, and at parting made me a very sensible and serviceable, if somewhat singular, present. He had a great respect for my uncle, he said, and he had carefully considered how he could show that he was really desirous of befriending and helping the nephew of so good a man, and as a result of this consideration he had come to the conclusion that a very useful present for a young man, and one likely to keep him out of harm's way in his evenings, would be an annual subscription to a great lending library. Accordingly he handed a reader's ticket to me at parting.

Ten months passed, and I had begun to think that my busy patron had forgotten all about me, when quite unexpectedly I received an invitation to breakfast with him one Sunday morning towards the end of July. Doctor X. was far too tenacious a man to drop anything or anybody he had once taken in hand. It has often surprised me to find that the busiest men seem to have the most leisure for friendly little attentions.

The busy physician had not forgotten me, nor had he forgotten his thoughtful present of a sub-



scription to the circulating library. One of his first questions was whether I had found it useful.

Now, it was not without some misgiving and a certain sense of shame that I essayed an answer to this question. For the truth was, that it was not for the more solid kinds of literature that I had taken advantage of my privilege. My reader must remember that when I went up to London I had just passed through the nerve-shattering grind of preparing for a competitive examination. I had consequently felt the need of a little relaxation, and had shrunk with something like a physical incapacity from the strain of heavy reading. When therefore, my benefactor asked whether I had found his present useful, I assured him that I had found it very useful; but I could not help reddening as I remembered that the numerous books I had taken out were not of the kind ordinarily called by that adjective.

Doctor X., however, was not to be put off with a general answer. He was really interested in my welfare, and he proceeded to question me more particularly, with the result that the whole truth came out. It was not so dreadful after all, for it appeared that he was himself a great reader of novels, especially of sensational novels. I was much relieved to find this, and we compared notes for a good quarter of an hour over our favorite stories, the laborious professional man astonishing me by showing as minute and ex-



haustive an acquaintance with recent fiction as myself.

Time passed very pleasantly this way, but all of a sudden an idea struck him that was not so exhilarating for me. He would have it that it was not merely for amusement that I had read so many volumes; he suspected, or he affected to suspect, that I had a purpose in my reading. So purposeful a man could hardly understand anybody's wasting a great deal of time in a particular line of reading without a purpose. His own purpose in reading novels was relaxation, but he had earned his right to it, and I was young and my professional labors were not heavy. Possibly it was simply inconceivable to him that I read only for amusement; and if it was conceivable, it would probably have seemed to him highly injudicious at my time of life. At any rate he suspected, or affected to suspect, that my object in reading so much fiction was to study the art and qualify myself for the practice of it.

Now, nothing was further from my thoughts. The bare idea was horrible to me. I had roused myself to make a furious cram for the competition, but once in I had no intention of doing any more work than the public service required of me. My father had left me a little money, though not enough to live upon. I was obliged to choose some bread-winning occupation, and it was because I believed the Civil Service to be an easy



life that I had made such an effort to get into it. The work of the office was quite enough for my appetite; I could have been content with less.

But it was in vain that I protested. My good friend, full of energy himself, would have it that I was possessed of literary ambition. I confessed to having written verses, though not for publication, but as regarded anything further assured him that he was mistaken. Still he professed not to be convinced, perhaps thinking this a good way to kindle a wholesome spirit in an idolent young man; and throwing himself back in his chair, he gave me his own ideas on the subject of novel-writing. The successful physician was eminently a man of practical talent.

“Passion and incident, d’ye see?—passion and incident, that’s what you want—what *we* want, I should rather say, d’ye see? Something out of the common. Characters, too, of course. If I take up a novel I don’t want to be bored with the ins and the outs of humdrum people. It may be very good psychology and all that, d’ye see? very good psychology and very clever and all that, but it’s not what we want, d’ye see? not what we want.”

I entirely agreed with him, and said so; and he continued, still holding himself well back in his chair, grasping an arm in each hand, and looking me directly and energetically in the face:—

“Passion and incident—I don’t pretend to know



much about it, but it strikes me that that is what you ought to look out for, d'ye see? if you mean to write novels and mean them to be read. If you have plenty of passion you may get along with comparatively little incident, and if you have plenty of incident you may get along with comparatively little passion. But it is better to have a good deal of both, d'ye see, particularly incident, unless the passion happens to be"— He paused an instant for a word and added, "tremendous, d'ye see?"

All this was said in an offhand way, but with great vigor of manner. When the great doctor's mind was unbent, he did not take much trouble about his words, as long as they came near his meaning; and it was his habit, in familiar explanation, to keep alongside of his hearer's understanding by frequent repetition of the formula "d'ye see?" He grappled on by it, so to speak; it answered the same purpose as holding on by a button, all the better that every time he used it he gave a straight and vivid look into his hearer's eyes, compelling attention. But it would not be fair, in reporting what he said, to write down this expletive as often as he used it; the words alone, without the keen, frank look that accompanied them, would give no idea of their peculiar effect.

His earnestness, which would probably have been equally great on any other topic, made me smile, and I repeated that I entirely agreed with



him. "But," I added, "if you mean that I should try to write fiction, I am none the better for knowing this, for I have not a spark of imagination or invention in me."

"Um," he said, "that's a pity." He pondered for a second or two; but having once decided that I must have a turn for writing, he would not let me off. "But it's not invention that does it, d'ye see? You've only got to look out, look round you, d'ye see? Much stranger things happen than ever were invented. We doctors, for example, could supply you with heaps of stranger things—if we were not under the seal of secrecy, d'ye see? professional confidence—heaps of stranger things than any fellow could invent. Nature's much wider, d'ye see? than a man's brain—more room for queer combinations."

I politely said that I quite believed it; but something false in my tone must have struck him, for he proceeded energetically to strengthen his assertion.

"Yes, I believe I could keep half-a-dozen novelists going, with raw materials, d'ye see? and sometimes they would want very little dressing. Now, for example, a few weeks ago I had a very interesting patient. Yes, I often have interesting patients, but this one was particularly so. A fine woman, a very fine woman, married to a man old enough to be her father, who is away from her pretty near all the time—a sort of 'grass widow,'



as they say, d'ye see? Very bright and very lively disposition, and very fashionable, but badly bored from having nothing particular to do; not having been bred to the life, d'ye see? perhaps eating too much, and certainly drinking too much. I ordered her down to the quiet of the country and the bracing air of the east coast, and put her on milk and that sort of thing, d'ye see? The air may do her good, but as for quiet—the woman couldn't be quiet."

I gave an appreciative laugh, but could think of nothing better to say than "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

"Eh, what?" said the doctor. The extreme commonplaceness of the remark evidently staggered him. "Idle hands, yes. The woman couldn't be quiet, d'ye see? She's sure to make mischief wherever she goes. Now, if I wanted to write a novel, and wanted to have a fresh plot, I should simply go down to the same neighborhood, d'ye see? and watch what happened; taking care to keep out of her way myself, of course," added the doctor, with a hearty laugh; "of course taking care to keep out of her way myself."

"And you would find both passion and incident in her proceedings," I echoed.

"Exactly," said the doctor; "we doctors don't believe in Fate, in one sense, d'ye see? but it comes to the same thing. Given a certain constitution and certain fixed circumstances, the rest



follows as a matter of course. You can't predict the exact thing, d'ye see? but you can predict the kind of thing."

The doctor relapsed into silence, and an abstracted look took possession of his features. Forgetting for the moment his professional position, and hardly thinking of what I was saying, I startled him by asking what was the lady's name.

"Eh? Her name?" he said, starting out of his reverie.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "Of course I shouldn't have asked that. I didn't really mean it. I spoke without thinking."

"No, of course I could not tell you her name," he said, with a smile, and looked at his watch. "But you should think seriously of it—I mean of writing, and that sort of thing, d'ye see?"

I did think of it, but not perhaps so seriously as my friendly patron would have approved of. His offer of unlimited raw material for stories out of his rich experience struck me as comical. I had not the faintest intention of attempting any such manufacture. I knew I had no talent for it; and even if I had supposed myself to be so gifted. I was not inclined to sacrifice my leisure for the sake of developing my talent. I had entered a public office with the intention of leading a quiet, leisurely existence, and I meant to do it.

I was a little inclined, too, to be credulous about the marvels at which the doctor hinted as having



occurred within his professional experience ; and his idea of being able to diagnose a woman as certain to produce strange events worth recording wherever she went, particularly tickled me.

By-and-by, as I turned the amusing idea over in my mind, I found myself beginning to wonder whether after all it was possible.

I was leaving for a month's holiday at the end of the week. I began to think that it might have been good fun to have the opportunity of testing the doctor's prediction, and to regret that as I did not know the name of the interesting patient, or where the doctor had ordered her to, this was out of my power.

All through the day the idea haunted me, till at last my curiosity on the point became so keen that I actually began to consider whether I could trace the lady with such information as the doctor had given. It was still, however, more in a spirit of whimsical speculation than serious intention that I reckoned up what I knew.

It amounted to this, that she was a woman of fashion, and that she had been ordered to try the bracing air of the east coast. This was not very definite, seeing that there are many resorts for invalids on the east coast of Britain. But as I reflected it occurred to me that the clue might be more definite than I was at first inclined to suppose. There are many salubrious resorts on the east coast, but almost every physician has his pet



sanatorium, and I remembered that Doctor X. was known to have great faith in the restorative virtue of the air of his own native coast.

Now that particular part of the east coast of Scotland is somewhat bare and bleak, entirely destitute of fashionable watering-places, and not at all richly provided with suitable accommodation for fashionable visitors. It occurred to me, then, that if I were to spend part of my holiday with my uncle at the Manse of Garvalt, as I already half thought of doing, I could easily discover whether any person answering to the doctor's description of his patient was settled anywhere in the neighborhood within twenty miles. It so happened that in the parish itself lay the house of a somewhat embarrassed landowner which was occasionally let for the shooting season ; it was just possible that the lady was there, for Doctor X.'s recommendation had once before obtained a tenant for it.

I wrote at once to my uncle, and asked whether Garacraig House was let for the season.

An answer came by return of post. My uncle was a bit of a humorist in his solemn, old-fashioned way. He affected to believe that I was after the house for myself, and wrote that he was glad that I found the public service so profitable that I was in a position to look out for a country house in which to recruit my exhausted energies.



Garacraig was unfortunately let to a Manchester man of the name of Ingers, whose lady had already come into residence. But if the Manse was not beneath his nephew's dignity, and he cared to spend a week or two there, an affectionate and respectful uncle would be most happy to see him.

This looked rather promising. It was, of course, but a remote chance that Mrs. Ingers would prove to be the doctor's patient, but it was enough to decide me to spend the first part of my holiday in Garvalt.

She must be a very turbulent person indeed, it struck me, if she could contrive to make a commotion of any kind in this staid and quiet parish—a person really worth observing.

When, however, I had reached this stage, a new consideration made me hesitate. Was it quite the right thing to set myself deliberately in this way to spy upon the woman? If this was she, I had discovered her secret by accident, by unintentional slip on the part of her medical attendant. Was it altogether honorable, was it not rather mean, to take advantage of this?

I put this question to myself, but I am afraid I rather evaded it. I persuaded myself that I was only half serious in my intention of watching her, that it was only a lark, and that of course I would not really go as a spy or a detective. I should only be in the neighborhood if anything in her



conduct came to general knowledge. I could not conceive what scope for startling incident any lady, however passionate, could find in so tame and humdrum a parish as Garvalt. But this, so far from diminishing my curiosity, rather whetted it.



## CHAPTER II.

## STARTLING NEWS.

THE Manse of Garvalt is six miles from the nearest railway station. My cousin, Mary Brown, my uncle's only child, drove the old phaeton to the station to meet me.

I caught sight of her face as the train ran in—a bright, clear-complexioned face, scanning the carriage windows with a frank smile of pleased expectation. I had expected to see my old friend Andrew, the Minister's man, in waiting for me, but I was not disappointed to see Mary instead.

Now, Mary had very little to do with the curious series of events that came under my observation. I will keep to them as faithfully as I can, and although she was and is well worth describing I will not linger over the description of her. Let it be understood once for all that I was not in love with her—at least not very ardently—and that she—I can state this without any qualification—was not in love with me.

I will not deny that I had made love to her in a mild way, and perhaps the pleasure of seeing her helped unconsciously to bring me to Garvalt at that particular time. She was two years



younger than I. I had been brought up from early boyhood in my uncle's house with her, my father and mother having lived in India and having both died young; and during my college vacations and her school holidays, as she grew into womanhood, I had written many verses to Mary and about her. To me saturated as I was with academic poetry, she was a type of Diana, of fair Cynthia, bright with heavenly radiance; and even now, as I think of her large dark blue eyes, fringed with dark long lashes, and overarched by clearly pencilled eyebrows, her full lips and perfect teeth, as perfect in shape as flawless in pearly whiteness, her tall, straight figure, and the firm poise of her head on finely moulded shoulders, it seems to me that an artist in search of a model for Diana might have gone farther than Mary Brown and fared worse. But alas! she was as cold as Diana to all my boyish sighs and vows; and whenever I was tempted to make love to her in earnest, she laughed at me and chaffed me till I was fain to abandon my serious vein.

"Dear me, Georgie," was her greeting, "what have you been doing to yourself since you went to London? You have made yourself positively good-looking."

"Positively good-looking!" I echoed, laughing. "I am glad you have become appreciative at last."

But I need not recall the chaff that passed between my light-hearted cousin and myself on this



and other personal topics, We were very good friends if we were nothing more, and we laughed and chatted merrily enough as we rattled along behind the old white horse.

Of course it was not long before I seized an opportunity of asking whether she had seen the new tenant of Garacraig.

"He has not made his appearance yet," she said. "He is not expected till it is time for the shooting."

"But the lady?"

"Mrs. Ingers? Yes, she has come. But what do you know about her?"

"Oh, nothing," I said, with perfect truthfulness; for as yet it was only a wild guess on my part that Mrs. Ingers might be the doctor's patient. "I never heard her name till your father mentioned it in his letter. Is she nice?"

"Very," said Mary; "quite fascinating, particularly with men. My father is quite in love with her, and my mother likes her because she is always so deferential to papa. She likes the company of clever people, she says. Fancy anybody calling papa clever! I wish she would call him so to his face. You know how he detests the word. But it is to mamma that she gushes about him, positively gushes about papa and his cleverness. It's a perfect picture to see the three of them together. I really had no idea he could be so fluent. She draws him out so, drinking in



every word as if he were an oracle, though all the time it must bore her to death to hear his theories about Free Trade, and Communism, and what not—you know them. And all the time my mother sits by, looking from the one to the other, as if it were the happiest and proudest moment in her life, and she had never before fully realized what a treasure of an old husband Providence had given her. Dear old papa, he does enjoy himself! We are to have her to tea this afternoon, and you will see. He is quite—what is the word?—rejuvenated.”

I allowed Mary to rattle on, and softly drew my own conclusions. First, that if Mrs. Ingers was the doctor's warranted mischief-maker, she would find little scope in my uncle's household, because the more she admired my uncle, the more she would win the gratitude and affection of my aunt. Second, that there was just a touch of jealousy in Mary's account of the fascinating stranger, and that this could not be due entirely to the lady's hypocritical worship at the feet of the old philosopher. Her “particularly with men” gave me a clue. There must be another man in the case, and I shrewdly suspected that it was a young doctor in the neighborhood, Alec Errol, whose attentions to Mary in former days had given me my first experience of the green-eyed monster.



"So you don't like Mrs. Ingers very much yourself, Mary?" I said.

"Oh yes," she protested, "we get on very well—exchange books and all that. But she has not much to say to me when she can get a man to talk to."

There was something very unlike Mary in this veiled detraction, and I was more convinced than before that there must be a reason for it.

"Has Alec Errol met her?" I asked slyly.

"Oh yes."

"He comes pretty often to the Manse, I suppose?"

Mary colored slightly, and gave the old horse a slight flick with the whip as she answered that her mother's health was still very uncertain.

"Does Mrs. Ingers think him very clever also?" I pursued.

The color in her face deepened. "She seems to think most men clever. She seems very generous in her appreciation of men. I shouldn't be surprised if she found something attractive *even in you.*"

This was a very vicious cut, and I laughed merrily; while Mary said that really I did not deserve that she should have come all the way to the station for me, braving all the perils of the road. "You don't know the risk I ran in coming for you," she declared.

"Is he so dreadfully jealous?" I asked.



"Don't be so silly, George," she answered, with every appearance of anger.

"Well, what other risk can there be on the Skateness turnpike? We are not in the Australian bush. Oh, I see. It must be old Mors. He has turned vicious in his old age. I always thought the name was uncanny. Only a horse of the most respectable character could have carried it off so long without misadventure."

Mary assured me that it was not Mors, the name we had given to my uncle's white horse when we had studied Latin together.

"What can it be, then?" I asked. I saw that I was not likely to get any more information out of her about Mrs. Ingers, and that she was making a violent effort to get away from the subject, so I thought it best to humor her, and made various absurd guesses as to the perils of the road between the Manse and the station, which had the effect of restoring her to her ordinary mirthful serenity.

At last she asked me if I had not seen a newspaper that morning.

"Yes," I answered, "I bought one as I came along, but I was only half awake, and I am not prepared to stand an examination upon it."

"And you actually looked at the paper without seeing that our quiet neighborhood is this day the centre of interest for the whole country?"

"Goodness gracious, Mary!" I cried. "What has happened? Your manner is most alarming."



Do you observe a deathly pallor stealing over my countenance? If there is not, please take it for granted. I am very pale within, if it does not show. Keep me, I pray you, no longer in suspense. Tell me the worst."

It passed through my mind that if Mary was not hoaxing me, which I grievously suspected, I might after all find some passion and incident in Garvalt even although Mrs. Ingers should not prove to be the lady I was in search of.

"Did you see nothing in the paper about an escaped convict?" she asked.

"I believe I did see something of the kind, now you speak of it."

"And did you not see where he had escaped from? You surely can't have missed that?"

"Strange as it may appear," I answered, "I was guilty of that amount of stupidity. Bear with me. I was half asleep. It surely was not from the prison at Skateness, though by your smiling you seem to say so?"

"It was. That convict is now at large, probably in this very parish, and by this time half famished and desperate. At this very moment he may be lurking behind that dyke," she added, pointing with her whip to one of the loose stone walls which serve the purpose of fences in this part of the country.

"You don't mean to say so!" I cried, in affected



alarm. "I wish I had bought a six-shooter before I started for these lawless wilds."

"I assure you I was looked upon at the Manse as a very foolhardy person when I proposed to drive to the station for you. Mother could hardly be brought to hear of my going. She begged me almost with tears to stay at home."

I laughed with a thoughtless freedom that was rather offensive to the heroine. She detected in my laugh an entire absence of any sense of the danger of the situation, and charged me with it roundly.

"Well," I admitted, "I don't quite see where the danger comes in."

"Don't you? Of course not. Do you suppose that when a convict knocks down a warder and gets clear away he has his pockets full of money like an Education Office clerk on a holiday?"

"I make no supposition on the subject," I answered. "It seems to me that it is for him to consider the ways and means before he seeks relief from official care, so to speak. A wise man always counts the cost, you know. That is a consideration for him, not for me."

"Oh, no doubt he considered it," said Mary confidently, ignoring my flippancy; "he had his ways and means all in his mind's eye. But answer me this. Being outside with no money in his pocket, with his jail-cropped hair and his convict clothes and the broad arrow to mark him out, so



that he couldn't beg, he must get food somehow, and how was he to get it? He must live somehow, you know."

"In the words of the philosopher," I answered, "I don't see the necessity."

"But he does," sharply retorted my cousin; "and that's why the whole parish of Garvalt is in such a state of consternation. I assure you that nobody stirred out of doors last night after dark."

"Has it become the habit, then," I asked, "Of this strange population on ordinary occasions to wander about at night, instead of going peaceably to bed like the rest of Her Majesty's subjects? It is not very long dark here in the beginning of August, you know."

"The worst of it is," pursued Mary, "that nobody knows who is to be attacked, and yet somebody is sure to be."

"It would certainly be more courteous on the part of the escaped gentleman if he would send timely notice to whomsoever he means to honor with the duty of providing for his wants. But the age of chivalry is dead."

"My father says," continued Mary, "taking a much less skittish view of the matter than a scoffing would-be Cockney, that it reminds him of the story of Grendel in Beowulf, the horrible monster who comes stalking across the moors at night out of the mist and the darkness, and bursts open the doors in search of human prey."



"Your father is a fine scholarly old gentleman, and has my respect," I said. "But, as sure as my name is Virgil, I hope Grendel will come when I am at the Manse."

"I hope so," said Mary, with emphasis.

"I should like to make the acquaintance of an escaped convict."

"Well, we shall see. Perhaps your wishes may be gratified sooner than you think, and you can tell me whether the reality comes up to your expectations. But in the mean time produce your newspaper, and we can make ourselves acquainted with him as far as possible secondhand."

"Distance lends enchantment to the view," I quoted, as I lugged the newspaper out of a pocket in my ulster. "But I thought you had seen it, from the exact knowledge you professed of the space occupied by the story."

"Oh, that was only a guess! I knew, of course, that there would be a lot about it in the paper. You don't mean to say that you are already so much of a Londoner as to have forgotten our country ways? Our post does not come in till ten o'clock, and the doctor has the paper till five."

Mary stopped abruptly and colored just a little.

"The doctor again!" said I, enjoying, though perhaps with a grain of uneasiness, her confusion. "Well, well, Mary, I know somebody who would not keep you waiting for the paper till five."

"Gevil," she retorted sharply, "you have no



idea how idiotic you look when you grin like that. Open your paper, and I will walk Mors, if you like, while you read. I am dying to know what they have found out about that convict. It was only yesterday he got off."

And Mors was reined in, nothing loath, while I read the newspaper report to my cousin. It has often been remarked that a very small and commonplace thing in our own neighborhood interests us more keenly than the biggest and most wonderful occurrences at a distance.



## CHAPTER III.

## HUE AND CRY.

WITH regard to this escaped convict, I will set down here some of the particulars that the reporters had discovered. It was the first case of an escape from the Harbor of Refuge Convict Works at Skateness, and naturally the local papers made a good deal of it.

The fugitive's name, it appeared, was Arthur Roper, alias Alexander Richards. He was not possessed of many aliases, from which it was to be inferred that he had not run a lengthened career as a criminal. Indeed, it was ascertained that, as far as was known to the police, he had committed only the crimes for which he had been put in durance, and it was mentioned as a singular fact that both crimes had been committed on the same person, and that person a relative of his own. The name of his victim was not given.

Roper was a native of Manchester, and had been an engineer by profession, a fast young man, addicted to sport and betting, and his first offence had been forgery. He had forged the name of a relative for quite considerable sums. For this offence he had been sentenced to a term of four years,



and had served out the whole time, carrying away with him a rather bad character for violence. This character he had fulfilled by committing a violent robbery within two months of his release, giving the name of Richards when he was apprehended. It looked as if he had been contaminated by his prison life and incapacitated for honest employment; but there was this curious circumstance about the second crime, which had been committed in Edinburgh at the time of the Exhibition, that his victim had been the very same relative whose name he had forged. It seemed thus as if the motive of the attack might have been revenge and not plunder; only it was the fact that he had garrotted his victim skilfully and stripped him of watch and money before he was caught, and it looked rather like a deliberate professional operation than a mere violent act on a sudden impulse. He had been sentenced, at any rate, to four years for this second crime, two of which he had served when he made his escape. His behavior had been better during this second term in prison. He had been bred originally an engineer, and he had taken in prison to the trade of a blacksmith, working at it with apparent contentment till the morning of his disappearance.

The gist of the story of escape was that he had been employed in some blacksmith work on one of the wagons in the outside prison yard, had felled the warder with a blow on the head that rendered



him insensible, seized his revolver, and bolted. The prison adjoined these, there being some works between it and the water: in this outside yard were manufactured concrete blocks used in the construction of the pier; a gate through which rubbish trucks were run was found open. He could never have got off unobserved but for the fact that the morning was very foggy; a dense mist covering coast and sea. The pursuit instituted as soon as the senseless warder was discovered had thus been rendered fruitless.

A trace of him had, however, been discovered during the day. A yacht was lying at anchor in the bay, some 300 yards from the prison, the *Foambell*, the property of an English gentleman named Wood, who was on board at the time. Mr. Wood had sent some of his men on shore in search of fresh provisions, and was leaning over the taffrail waiting for breakfast, and waxing rather impatient at the unexpected length of their absence, when he heard a gun fired—the signal that a prisoner had escaped. A few minutes afterward a boat came suddenly out of the fog. “Easy, easy!” he shouted, thinking it was his own men; but the next instant he recognized the prison white jacket and toque of the solitary sculler. Warned by the shout, the man turned his head just in time, and sweeping round passed within a yard or two of the prow. He showed his gratitude by leaving behind him a shower of



fierce oaths, desiring to be informed what the yachtsman meant by sticking up his blooming old yacht there, and not getting out of the way.

Mr. Wood at once sent notice to the prison of what he had seen, and it was found that a boat was missing from the beach, a small coble with which the workmen of a neighboring quarry were in the habit of fishing after hours. Roper had gained the beach under cover of the fog, and made off with it.

But in what direction had he gone? Skatness, a small fishing town, was forty miles from any large town with a low-quarter of professional criminals among whom he might find sympathizers and shelterers. For miles upon miles inland stretched a closely cultivated district bare of trees, where a man in convict dress could not long elude observation and would have difficulty in finding any temporary hiding-place. Along coast to the south for five or six miles was a stretch of precipitous rocks, deeply indented with creeks and hollowed out into caves; beyond that, two miles or so of hummocky sands; then rocks again. On the coast line to the north came first a deep bay, lined with the fishing town of Skatness, the bay that was being enclosed by a breakwater to form a harbor of refuge; beyond that, some miles of level sands; beyond that again more rocky seaworn cliffs. If the fugitive knew the country, he would naturally make for



the cliffs either to north or south : nowhere else had he any chance of temporary concealment.

But which had been his direction, south or north ? This was a question of some interest to us in Garvalt, for we lay to the south, and as I read from the newspaper to my cousin, she quickened her attention at the statement that search-parties had been sent out in both directions. Had they found any clue to his movements ?

They had ; and it pointed northward.

A peculiar method of curing fish is in use on that coast. Haddocks and whittings are cleaned and salted, and spread out to bleach and dry in the sun ; near the fishing villages you will see the rocks covered with them, and the fences festooned with them for hundreds of yards.

A little girl was engaged in this industry on the rocky point of the bay on the opposite side from the convict establishment, spreading out the fish from a heap under an old pilot jacket where they had been collected to protect them from the rain of the previous afternoon, when a man rowed up and asked her some questions about the coast to the north. When she had answered his questions, not a little confused and frightened by his looks, he asked her for some fish ; and when she refused and scampered off, he landed and carried off some handfuls of fish as well as the old pilot-jacket, threatening to come back and do for her if she told any body that she had seen him.



From this the police concluded—so at least the reporters said—that Roper had gone northwards, and was lurking either among the sand dunes or among the rocks on the coast beyond them. But they had not found his hiding-place, nor had they recovered the stolen boat. Mary and I had a little argument on the point. I contended that his question to the girl was a blind; that he bound her over to secrecy, knowing that that was the surest way of making her tell; and that he spoke of the north, meaning to make for the south, and was now almost to a dead certainty, lurking somewhere in the neighborhood of Garvalt. Mary, however, refused to be intimidated, and argued on the other hand, first, that the police were much more likely to be right than I was; and second, a more reasonable though not a perfectly consisted argument, that in the fog the convict must have rowed more or less at random, and that nobody knew any more than himself in what direction he had fled.

A description of the fugitive was appended in leaded type: —“A powerfully built man 5 feet, 11½ inches in height; age, 33; complexion, dark; dark gipsy eyes, in fleshy sockets; wide mouth with protruding under lip and strong square chin.” A typical villain’s build, which for easy recognition hardly needed the special marks that were also advertised, namely, “two teeth on the left side of the upper jaw turned in, and a knot



on the back of the left hand." The minute industry of the reporters had gleaned the fact that these bodily injuries had been incurred by Mr. Roper, when he was a sportive young man at Manchester, the turned-in teeth being the result of a blow from a cricket-ball, the broken metacarpal bone of a kick at football. He had been a leading exponent of both sports.



## CHAPTER IV.

## DR. X.'S STRANGE PATIENT.

I SAW Mrs. Ingers for the first time that afternoon at the Manse, and I confess that at first I was somewhat disappointed. I was possessed with the idea that she must be the patient of whom Doctor X. had spoken. I had no good reason for fastening upon the tenant of Garacraig as this identical lady, but somehow I clung to the belief as a matter of intuitive faith, and had formed in my mind unconsciously an image corresponding to what I had heard of her powers of stirring passion and causing strange incident wherever she went. I had expected to see something much more dazzling and commanding, reserved and suggestive of mysterious depths, than the frank and graceful lady who entered the room.

I am ashamed to say that I cannot recall how she was dressed, except that she wore a straw hat with a low crown and a wide straight brim, and a well-fitting jacket of the same material as her gown, a dun-colored tweed. Now that I think of it, the wide brim of her hat must have been tilted a little from behind, for I remember



that it almost hid her eyes when she bowed to me on my introduction.

I was too much occupied in comparing her with my preconceived ideal to pay much heed to her dress. I had expected to see a dark woman ; she was fair, with liquid eyes of grayish blue, and a nondescript complexion, slightly browned by exposure to the keen sea air of our coast. I had expected to see a woman of reserved bearing, a sphinx-like person, dealing out weal and woe with calm, unmoved exterior ; she entered the room with frank and impetuous grace, as if eager to meet the cordial welcome of my aunt, with whom she was already in a few weeks on the footing of an old and dear friend.

"This can never be Dr. X.'s grass widow," I said to myself, as I met her friendly look and smile and abandoned myself to the charm of her sympathetic presence. A charm Mrs. Ingers undoubtedly had, though it was not the charm of dazzling beauty or mysterious reserve, but rather of manner and look and voice. Her figure was tall and graceful, but you would not have said that she was beautiful till she began to talk. It was then that you began to be struck with the fineness with which her features were outlined. There was something singularly attractive in her voice, a certain indescribably sympathetic ring. It was the last voice in the world to be associated with any thought of cruel harm ; rather was it



most eloquently suggestive of tenderness and kindly feeling. It quite bore out what she said of herself to my cousin Mary : that the one thing in the world she cared for was affection, that she did covet people's affection, that it was so nice to be loved and thought pleasantly of. " Particularly by men," was Mary's comment when she told me this ; but therein I think Mary, though a good-natured girl enough, showed a spice of jealousy, for nothing could have been prettier or more delicate than Mrs. Ingers' attentions to my invalid aunt.

My aunt was an invalid, confined to her couch and to carriage exercise, with great stores of small talk ready to discharge themselves upon any good listener, and Mrs. Ingers was a good listener. To do my aunt justice, she was a good talker, with a steady, gentle voice, a thoughtful woman and a great reader ; and Mrs. Ingers listened with exemplary patience and show of interest, even when the talk went beyond her depth.

Next to the quiet enjoyment of conversing herself, my aunt liked to see anybody giving an attentive ear to her husband, and in this also Mrs. Ingers showed the utmost consideration. My uncle ardently liked her ; his reception of her was benevolence itself.

Before the arrival of Mr. Ingers there had been some speculation between his irreverent daughter and myself as to what would be the subject of the



reverend gentleman's first remark after the usual formalities. There was a big political speech on the Irish question in the newspaper, and I was inclined to think that my uncle would plunge at once into this, being too much of a philosopher to be engrossed by local affairs. His daughter, on the other hand, was positive that he would begin with the escaped convict. I groaned at the mention of him. We had a small bet on the subject.

Mrs. Brown as it happened led off before her husband had a chance of showing what was uppermost in his mind.

"I hope you were not very much frightened last night, Mrs. Ingers," she said. "We were all in such a state of consternation here. About that dreadful man who has run away from the prison, you know," she added, in answer to Mrs. Ingers' inquiring look.

Mary rose to ring for tea, and as she passed me, whispered in triumph: "I win. Look out for Grendel. Papa is certain to bring in Grendel."

It looked extremely probable; for Mr. Brown had brought down his shaggy eyebrows over his deep-set eyes and begun to stroke his long patriarchal white beard as was his manner before making a remark. But it generally took him some little time to get into position for conversational fire.

"My cousin," said Mary, spoiling her own



chance of winning the bet in her eagerness to chaff me, "hopes he will visit the Manse. He won't believe in the danger."

"But there isn't any real danger, is there?" asked Mrs. Ingers, turning to me, with her brows slightly knit.

"Not the least," said I confidently. "They are certain to catch him in a day or two. My cousin talks about him as if he were a man-eating tiger. The utmost he is likely to do is to plunder a scare-crow of its clothes, and steal a few turnips or dried fish to keep himself alive."

"I don't know about that, George," said Mrs. Brown, in her gentle voice. "I assure you we are all very much excited about him. People accustomed to town life and to police protection don't realize the danger. I am afraid he will not be content to subsist on turnips and dried fish."

Mr. Brown again worked his eyebrows and stroked his beard as if about to speak, but Mrs. Ingers was not familiar with the symptoms, and anticipated him.

"We do not put much faith in the police," she said. "My husband always keeps a revolver by him at night when we live in the country, and he insisted upon my bringing it with me when I came here. You know country houses are very often attacked by burglars."

"And can you really use a revolver, my dear?" asked my aunt, half-rising from her couch in as-



tonishment. "I should be afraid to take a loaded one in my hand for fear of shooting myself. I should be more likely to do that than to shoot the burglar. But then, I am so very nervous. And you could really use it? I admire your courage, my dear."

"I am afraid my courage would ebb if it came to that," laughed Mrs. Ingers. "But I used to practice shooting with my brothers when I was a girl."

"Ah, that alters the case," replied Mrs. Brown. "But I would rather trust the police."

Mary and I joined with Mrs. Ingers in depreciating the police, but Mrs. Brown made a gallant defence of them, saying that she thought people were generally unjust to them, and did not make fair allowance for the difficulties and the dangers of running down a desperate criminal. They could not always be on the spot to prevent crime, and they often made very clever captures.

Mrs. Brown would have gone on in this strain for some time, as, indeed, she could have done on almost any topic, being, as most invalids are when confined to the house, well charged with thoughts accumulated during her enforced loneliness and inaction; but she paused, seeing that Mr. Brown betrayed his usual symptoms of having something to say. She paused and looked at her husband, as if waiting for his remark. He spoke in a peculiar loud staccato tone, with very distinct syllabifica-



tion, carrying his pulpit voice into private conversation, as was his habit, especially in the company of strangers. Mary and I watched eagerly for his first words, thinking it just possible that he might after all change the subject of talk, and plunge into politics.

"I observe from the newspaper," he began very deliberately, "that the person in question—I mean the escaped convict—"

At this point, Mary withdrew to a distant window, and I followed her. We discussed in low but animated tones whether Mary had won her bet or not, I arguing that the convict had been introduced by Mrs. Brown, and that we must wait for an independent *ab initio* remark by the reverend gentleman before our wager could be decided.

All unconscious of this side-issue, Mr. Brown, distracted for an instant by the movement, smiled benignantly at Mrs. Ingers, and resumed.

"I observe that this escaped convict, whose name, it seems, is Arthur Roper—his original name, that is to say, not his *alias*, for he may have many of them—comes from Manchester originally. It is, of course, a remote possibility, but it might so happen, and that would be very curious, that you had known him in his better estate. May I ask is it so?"

Mrs. Ingers looked a little disconcerted at the questions,



"What a very foolish question, William," cried Mrs. Brown, interposing before Mrs. Ingers could find anything to say.

"What is this that papa has been saying?" asked Mary, returning to the circle.

"He has just asked Mrs. Ingers whether she knew the convict Roper in his better days," said Mrs. Brown, with a laugh. Mary laughed heartily, and Mrs. Ingers recovered herself and joined in.

"It is like one of our farmers here," resumed Mrs. Brown, "who happened to meet a Bengalee medical student. 'So you come from India!' he said; 'I have a son in Ceylon myself, in the coffee planting line. Maybe you've come across him.'"

"I only put it as a remote possibility," pleaded Mr. Brown, joining in the laugh at his own expense.

"It would have been a more reasonable question," continued his chatty wife, "to ask whether Mrs. Ingers was acquainted with Mr. Wood, the owner of the yacht, who saw him escaping."

Mrs. Ingers hastened to say that she did know Mr. Wood; and, in answer to questions from Mrs. Brown, told us a few things about him: that he was a man of fortune, the son of a wealthy merchant, very clever and accomplished; that he was a great authority in amateur theatricals; that painting was his hobby, and that he used his yacht to visit the most beautiful places on the coast,



"He will not find much beauty here," remarked Mrs. Brown.

"But the rocks are very grand," said Mrs. Ingers. "And Mr. Wood has not the ordinary ideas about beauty." She seemed to be quite enthusiastic about him.

Mr. Brown looked preoccupied while this conversation went on, stroking his beard meditatively, and took advantage of a pause to get under way again.

"It is often made a subject of remark," he said, "as a very curious thing that you rarely meet any stranger without discovering when you get into conversation, that you have some common acquaintance. It is remarked upon, I say as curious, but rightly understood and properly considered, so to speak, it is not curious at all; rather it would be curious if it were not so. It is not the smallness of the world, as has been said, but the smallness relatively of certain sections or circles of individuals in it, who occupy similar positions in life, travel at the same seasons to very much the same places with very much the same objects, put up at the same kind of hotels, and get acquainted one with another. Therefore it is not surprising that Mrs. Ingers should know about Mr. Wood, for how many persons, do you suppose, can afford to keep yachts? And that limited number of persons naturally must have common



interests that bring them into contact at a considerable variety of points."

Mrs. Brown cast down her eyes and smiled; it was not the first time she had heard this theory propounded. It was new to Mrs. Ingers, apparently, for she listened to it with a show of interest and even animation, and she looked at the rugged and shaggy but venerable philosopher admiringly. "How very clever!" she said. "I never thought of that before."

Thus encouraged, the philosopher fairly took possession of the house. He was loquacious enough once he had got a fair start.

"The generality of people," he went on, "are content to look at the mere surface of facts; they do not apply the reasoning faculties to get down to the roots and causes of things. And yet there is a concatenation between circumstances apparently the most diverse which is very curious and very beautiful, when you can establish it to your satisfaction."

He paused; but pulled down his eyebrows and stroked his beard and kept his mouth half-open, as if there were more to come.

"And to the dissatisfaction of other people," I muttered; "that is also essential to make a theory really beautiful as well as curious."

Mr. Brown took no notice of the interruption. He probable did not hear it. "For example," he continued, "has it ever occurred to you how



direct the connection is between Free Trade and the immorality which, I regret to say, is, from all that I read in the public prints, unfortunately so prevalent among the upper classes?"

Mrs. Ingers looked rather dismayed at this grave question, and shook her head, with a faint smile. Mrs. Brown, with her usual tact, saw that her visitor had had enough of my philosophic uncle, and came to the rescue.

"That is, no doubt, a very fine theory, William," she said, "and very sound; but it is too deep for us poor women. Our brains are not equal to it. Don't you think, Mrs. Ingers, that it is on questions of that kind that we become aware of own inferiority?"

Mrs. Ingers agreed eagerly.

"It's all a matter of education," cried my uncle; but he looked not displeased at the compliment to his sex, and dropped the subject.

Mary and I walked back to Garacraig with Mrs. Ingers. She was delightfully free from stiffness and reserve. She had made friends at once with her neighbors at the Manse, and she accepted me as one of the family, entitled to the same favorable terms of social commerce.

Very much to my surprise, I learned in the course of the walk that it was on the recommendation of Doctor H. that she had come to Garacraig. And glad she was that she had come. She was enthusiastic in praise of our bracing air; her



gallops on the sands had made another woman of her.

So she was the doctor's patient after all. I was so astonished that I could not help confiding to Mary what the doctor had said ; adding, I am afraid, that it only showed what fools doctors could be.

"Wait till you see, Georgie," said my cousin.

"That shows how spiteful women can be," I retorted.

We certainly encountered no bursts of passion or marvellous incidents on the following day, when we accompanied Mrs. Ingers on a benevolent visit to some of the old fisherwomen in whom she took an interest. But on the day after that, things did become a little more lively, as you shall hear.



## CHAPTER V.

## WAS IT A SIGNAL?

ON the second afternoon after my arrival at the Manse, I announced to my cousin Mary that I was out for a solitary walk by the sea, and "a big think" over things in general. What put me into this mood, it would not interest my readers to know. It was my first holiday since I had begun life in earnest, my first pause in the race, and I wished to be alone to exercise freely my privilege as a rational man of looking before and after. Perhaps, too, my relations with Mary were not quite what I had hoped for, and the young medico, Errol—but I will not trouble whoever cares to read this narrative with my private affairs. Enough to say that I was moved to take my pipe and stroll out with my face set seawards, meaning to make for an old churchyard on the links within hearing of the sleepless waters, and sit there among the tombs, and smoke and think and watch the stars come out.

Whether tobacco is an aid to thought, and how far, and in what manner, are nice questions upon which the learned are not yet in complete agreement. I do not mean whether smoking is on the



whole good or bad for man ; that is another question, upon which it may be remarked that there are very few smokers who have not at one time or another regretted having ever acquired the habit. But does smoking help the contemplative mind? It may be a very nasty habit and yet do this. Does it scatter the thinker's ideas, or does it help him to consecrate them, and so advance the solution of knotty problems? It is undoubtedly a widespread belief among smokers that the latter is the effect ; that a pipe soothes the nerves, lulls distracting impulses, and leaves the mind free to apply its powers evenly and with full strength to whatever is set before it. But there are not wanting sceptical persons who hold that this is a mere illusion. That a pipe puts you into a tranquil mood, most fit for meditation and deep thought, they cannot deny ; but they say that in the mood thus produced by the fumes of tobacco you only fancy that you are thinking ; that you really make less progress than if you were not smoking, only the smoking makes you so tranquil and contented that you are quite satisfied with whatever passes through your mind. We must probably fall back on the safe conclusion that tobacco acts differently on different constitutions, for was not the philosopher Hobbes a smoker, who contrived to do a good deal of hard thinking in his day and generation?

However the theory may be settled, undoubt-



edly, as a matter of fact, upon my particular constitution, on this quiet August evening tobacco did not so act as to excite and clear my powers of resolute meditation. It rather co-operated with the soothing influences of the time and scene. It was the hour of rest from labor. A ploughman passed me on his way to the smithy, to have a loose horse-shoe fixed, sitting sideways on the slow pacing-horse, whistling, the reins on the horse's neck. In a turnip-field near at hand I saw Andrew, the Minister's man, his hands deep in his pockets, a black cutty in his mouth; he had finished his survey of the drills and was making for the roadside and the whistling ploughman, with long leisurely strides, emitting a thick cloud at every third step. He undoubtedly found solace in the narcotic herb. Seawards was a grass-field, in which some cattle who had finished their evening meal lay winking at the declining sun, moving their tails uneasily now and then, too lazy to whisk off the midges. A low, drowsy murmur came from the sea itself, across the marshy flats and the yellow bent grass of the sand hillocks on the border of the beach.

The purity of the air, the silence, the absence of movement, struck forcibly on my senses as if streaming in voluminously to fill up a void. And so I followed my long shadow toward the sea, pulling contentedly at my pipe, my strenuous intention of having a "big think" deferred till I



should reach the spot where I purposed to sit with all the circumstances favorable for mental concentration.

To a stranger the country round me would have seemed as bare, monotonous, and featureless as any tract of the habitable globe could be. Not a tree, not a hedgerow, to be seen when I had passed the brow of the hollow in which lay the Manse and Garacraig; nothing visible, turn where I would, but alternate fields of turnips, grass, and green corn, green corn, grass and turnips—all in big, rectangular plots, separated by uniform fences of dry stone wall or wire-paling. But I had spent my boyhood here, and memory supplied the plain landscape with many points of interest. Here, in the field on the right, Andrew had first allowed me to hold the plow, and I could still remember the wrench from the stilts that had almost pulled my arms out of their sockets. There, on the left, the same agricultural authority had rebuked me in biting and never-to-be-forgotten words for not knowing the difference between a turnip and a "scalich." A bit of the stone dyke a hundred yards off, that, to the casual eye, was a bit of a stone dyke and nothing more, was individualized and endeared to me as the spot where I had sat one evening reading "The Woman in White" till the light failed and I had to hurry home to my candle in a fever of suspense. Among the monotonous sand-dunes in



front of me, my eyes rested with joyful recognition on the very hillock where I had shot at—and missed—my first rabbit. I could still hear the rustle of the bents through which the creature had scampered off, frightened but unhurt. To the passing tourist, if ever a tourist was misguided enough to pass that way, one twenty yards of the coast would have seemed as good, or as bad, as another; to the boy whose solitary playground they had been for years, every hillock had its little associations. And to eyes thus quickened by many memories, the plain landscape, under the level rays that lightened up the heights and cast deep shadows on the hollows, assumed a variety that became almost picturesque. Beyond all was the ever-changing, ever-interesting sea, with its great masses of soft color.

Thus I walked on, with my pipe for genial company, and thoughts that chased one another slowly and tenderly, striding on with contented steps to the spot where it was my set purpose to sit down for serious meditation. Between the arable land and the billowy sand-dunes was a narrow, level stretch, covered mostly with smooth green turf, but broken here and there by low sand-heaps, which the long brown bents claimed for their own, and here and there by strips and patches of marshy ground, where regiments of tall green weeds found nourishment. For a mile or more reached this level turf without other inter-



ruption, save that right in the middle of it, on a slightly raised platform, rose a building that looked in the distance like a miniature walled town, with a crowd of irregular chimneys and spires projecting above the fortification. This was the old burying-ground where the rude forefathers of the parish slept, at a distance from the habitation of the living, in the solitude of the lonely links, with the restless sea sounding its changes over them. The ruins of the old parish church, deserted now for more than a century, stood within the circuit of the walls. Tradition said that this spot, now so lonely, was once the centre of the parish, and that all the seaward half had been swallowed up by a tremendous storm. Between the old churchyard and the sea a group of sand-hills were piled up to unusual height and thickness, and it was the fancy of the neighborhood, though not much given to superstition, that the sea beat there with unusual force, and that during storms bands of fiends gathered and howled encouragement to the waves, as if they would fain get possession of the consecrated ground.

Just before I left the rough cart road and entered on the grassy flat of which I have spoken as lying between the sandbanks and the ploughland, I noticed a small schooner in the offing, its sails white in the sinking sunlight. It was the only moving thing visible, and it was moving slowly. The repose of the scene was perfect. I walked



with slackened step along the soft grassy level towards the churchyard, and the yacht was hidden from my view by a higher range of sandhills.

Presently, as I advanced, my eye was caught by another moving object, a small red flag fluttering in the faint wind on the high dunes between the churchyard and the sea. It was hardly bigger than the red flag that golfers use to mark their holes; and but for the place in which it appeared, on the seaward face of a sandhill, almost at the top, I might have supposed that this game had been introduced into Garvalt during my absence. But I knew every foot of the ground, and saw, from its position, that it could not be a golf flag. The next instant I connected it with the vessel I had seen in the offing. Could it be a smuggler's signal? Smuggling had been suspected in the parish.

Curiosity prompted me to stroll in the direction of the flag and see what was to be seen. With this view I slightly altered my course.

Let me describe more exactly the position of the churchyard. It lay right across the level on a slight rise, an oblong enclosure with four walls about breast-high. The ground on which it lay was a little higher than the valley, but immediately beyond the seaward wall the sandbanks rose abruptly in mound after mound till the highest overtopped the tallest monument of the place of tombs. It was from the seaward face of the highest that the flag was displayed.



Now, I was within thirty or forty yards of the enclosure, and making for the middle of the north wall facing me, where there was a flight of steps, when I first caught sight of the flag. I changed my direction, therefore, to the left, meaning to pass the north-east corner of the churchyard and climb the sandbanks.

But as I neared this corner, walking on the noiseless turf, I heard sounds from the churchyard which made me stop and listen. The height of the wall and the elevation of the ground prevented me from seeing into the churchyard: I could see only the tops of the higher tombstones, and a portion of the ruined wall of the old church adjoining the north-east corner. It was from there that the sounds seemed to proceed.

I heard a woman sobbing, and presently the broken words reached my ears:

“Ah me, why have you always come between me and happiness? It is too, too cruel.”

Above her sobs I heard a gruff hard voice make answer, “You say nothing of what you have done for me.”

“For you!” she cried, in scornful reproach. Sobs seemed to choke her utterance. For a moment only this inarticulate grief was audible. Then she burst out again passionately—“This is the third time. Oh, you have ruined my life. It is hard, too, too hard to bear! Why was I brought into the world to be persecuted like this?”



"You forget that I should have been another man if I had never known you."

To this there was no answer but her weeping.

"You might give a fellow another chance," said the gruff voice.

Still no answer.

"Just enough to give me a start."

Still she did not answer, and the gruff voice continued to plead.

"It's been deuced hard lines for me all along. I should never have been down but for you. You can't leave me in this fix. Only enough for a start. To-morrow at two. Bring it then. I can hang on till then. If you don't by"—

I have transcribed all that I heard; but I was more than a listener during part of this strange colloquy—I had to make up my mind what to do. The first words so arrested me that I listened as if I had been at a play, without thinking of my own position—listened with absorbed attention, surprised beyond measure, and trying to make out the situation of the speakers. Who were they? and what was their painful conference about?

In the woman's first words, agitated and broken as they were, I seemed to recognize the voice of Mrs. Ingers. I was certain of this when she spoke again. How had she come there? Who was this man whose presence was so disturbing to her? How had they met in this lonely place?



It must surely have been by appointment. Was the red flag a signal between them?

It was this idea that first made me think of my own position as a listener. If they were there for privacy, I could not play the eavesdropper.

My first impulse was to walk quietly away and leave them to themselves. But this the woman's obvious distress forbade. When the gruff voice began to be importunate, it was evident that she was in danger. She was certainly so if they were alone—and no other voice was audible. I decided to stay, and hold myself ready to interfere if it became necessary.

I had hardly come to this conclusion, when the gruff voice changed from an entreating to a threatening tone.

The menacing tones enraged me at the ruffian; but I have always had a horror of intruding into other people's affairs unbidden, and I was sufficiently master of myself to reflect that an abrupt interruption might not be welcomed by the lady, if the meeting between her and the man was not accidental. I decided, therefore, to show myself as quickly as possible above the wall, and let them see me without my seeming to be aware of their presence.

To do this, it was necessary that I should turn the northeast corner of the wall on my left, pass along by the seaward wall, above which my head would be visible, and perhaps climb some way up



the long, thin grass of the sandbanks between the churchyard and the sea.

I executed this movement ; and, as soon as I judged that my head and shoulders were visible, I cleared my throat, looking steadily towards the sea.

Immediately I heard a faint scream and a rustle. I turned, and saw a man jumping over graves and flat tomb-stones, making rapidly for the farther wall. The ground inside the churchyard was several feet higher than the ground outside, and he swung himself over the wall easily, and disappeared. Disappeared ; but not before I had noted his dress—an old pilot jacket, dilapidated trousers, and an old Scotch bonnet. As he swung himself over the wall, the jacket lifted, and I saw a white coat underneath marked with broad arrows. It was the convict.

My readers will probably not be so much surprised as I was. In view of the part that the convict had in the events I have undertaken to record, I have considered it necessary to mention the conversation I had with my cousin about him, and that must have served as a preparation for his appearance. But till I saw this scarecrow figure leaping nimbly over the churchyard wall, I had never thought of the convict Roper in connection with Mrs. Ingers, although, as soon as I saw him, I remembered in a flash how we had all



laughed at my uncle's idea that Mrs. Ingers might have met him "in his better estate."

I stood stock-still, staring at the spot where he had disappeared. Then I looked at Mrs. Ingers. She was seated on a tombstone near the bit of ruinous church-wall; her head was bent, she held her handkerchief to her face, and her frame was violently agitated.

I took a step or two to run after the man; but the sounds that came from Mrs. Ingers made me hesitate, and induced me to observe her more closely.

She was in convulsions of laughter.

I raised my hat, and stammered, "I beg pardon;" though, in the confusion of the moment, with an overpowering sense of the awkwardness of my position, I could not frame an articulate statement of the subject of my apology, and "for interrupting you" died away upon my lips.

My words seemed to augment her merriment. I turned half round, to go away.

Her laughter stopped. "Please do not go away," she pleaded, in a distressed voice. "I have been so terribly frightened."

The word "frightened" changed my mind again. I determined to give chase. I was glad of something to do, as a relief from my embarrassed position. I ran along the narrow space between the seaward wall and the sandbanks towards the side on which he had disappeared.



I heard her call after me.

"Don't, don't. He has a revolver. He will shoot you. Do come back."

But I ran on till I turned the corner and had a view of the ground to the south of the churchyard.

No living thing was visible but a couple of sheep, which were standing a few yards away from the churchyard and looking back, as if they had been startled. At sight of me they made another start, and again halted and looked back.

The man must have taken refuge among the grassy mounds which rose to the south of the churchyard, beginning with an easy slope a few yards from the wall. The hollows that separated them were deep enough to conceal him. I ran a step or two forward, with the intention of climbing to the top of the nearest, from which the fugitive might be visible.

But I stopped on hearing the voice of Mrs. Ingers begging me in agonized entreaty to stay. "Will nobody listen to me?" she cried, in the same despairing tones that had first arrested my attention. "For God's sake, let him go!"

She had come close to the wall, and was leaning over it with hands clasped in front of her, looking in my direction with knit brows, but not looking at me, "mind and sight distractedly commixed."

"What is the use of chasing him? I tell you



he is armed. You will only tempt him to add murder to his other crimes."

I made a few reluctant steps toward her. It was undoubtedly the most prudent course to desist from the pursuit. And yet, though I am far from being a person of ardent and headstrong physical courage, I was so excited by what I had overheard of this ruffian's attempt to levy blackmail on a defenceless woman that I would have chased him at all hazards if I had not been irresistibly convinced by her manner that she had other reasons than a regard for my safety in begging me to desist. Never in my life have I been in such an awkward and puzzling position. Like Hamlet, I had fallen into circumstances where some action seemed to be imperatively required of me, while action was paralyzed by inability to see my way clear, and doubt whether I might not do more harm than good by acting without full knowledge. A half wish crossed my mind that I had gone away quietly and left them to settle their own affairs. But any such wish was too late now; what did she really wish me to do? After all, it was her affair, and the tone of her despairing cry, "Will nobody listen to me?" seemed to imply that however badly the man had behaved to her, she had reasons for wishing him not to be pursued.

As I came back slowly and doubtfully, checked by this consideration, but still uncertain, I kept



my eyes fixed on her face, engrossed by the desire to divine her real mind. Oddly enough, as I looked, an entirely irrelevant idea took possession of me, a cool, critical recognition of her remarkable beauty in her present attitude. Her face was flushed, and the fine outlines of her features were made clearer and firmer by the intensity of her mood. I have already said that her beauty was not so remarkable in repose ; it was dazzling now when her inner being was stirred to the full pitch of its energy.

It was strange that I should have come nearer than before to realizing my preconceived ideal of her as an imperious Queen of Hearts the very moment after her mysterious implication with a low ruffian had tainted my first favorable impression of her and disturbed me with something like repulsion. The very purity of the outlines of her intense features seemed to protest against the degradation of this connection.

But this intense look lasted only for a moment. When she saw that I was disposed to obey her and abandon the pursuit of the convict, she again began to laugh, musically enough, but heartily, as if she were trying to control herself but could not.

Now, there is nothing so disconcerting and uncomfortable as to stand before a person struggling with a fit of uncontrollable laughter without knowing or being able to guess what the laughter is about. The discomfort of the position is in-



creased when one is uncertain about the propriety of one's own conduct immediately before. I became a little impatient of my companion's laughter, and I daresay my face betrayed my bewilderment.

"Forgive me," she said, "for laughing so foolishly. I beg your pardon, I am sure; but I really cannot help it. The change of scene was so sudden, and there was something so odd in the way he jumped over the wall that he put me in mind of a harlequinade. You have seen a clown jumping through a wall when the policeman came up, and the policeman's look of astonishment. It was really like that." And she laughed again.

I could not quite get rid of an uneasy feeling that I had played the part of the ludicrous policeman, but her laughter was so infectious, as she stood there with her left hand on her side and her head thrown back laughing till she panted for breath, that I joined in a little, though uneasily conscious that it might be partly at my own expense. She seemed as if she never would have done.

"I am glad," I said, at length, "that it is only a laughing matter." I may possibly have spoken in an offended tone.

This remark seemed to sober her. She sat down on a flat gravestone. I came nearer to the wall.

"You ask me to forgive you for laughing," I



said. "I ought to ask your forgiveness for intruding as I did." My sense of the awkwardness of this had returned in fresh strength with the continuance of her unaccountable mirth.

"On the contrary," she answered, "I am deeply indebted to you. Your coming was most fortunate. I cannot tell you what a relief it was."

"Then you were really in danger?"

"In danger? Yes." She looked round with a shudder. "A good scene for a tragedy this, is it not? This lonely churchyard, and the waning light. How the darkening valley seems to drink in the sound of the sea. You might scream loud enough here before anybody heard you, and your body might lie for days before anybody came here to find it. Fancy," she continued, with another shudder, "being murdered in a cemetery. There would be a certain convenience in it, would there not?"

I tried to smile in appreciation to her hysterical humor. Her nerves were evidently unstrung by the terrible agitation she had undergone.

"Now, when I come to think of it," she went on excitedly, "it was that that made me laugh as much as anything, your timid, apologetic look, as if you were respectably afraid of intruding when really you had come just in time to save my life perhaps."

I fear I am rather a conventional-minded person, as a public servant ought to be; but I had



sense enough to see the humor of this, and my appreciative smile was this time more genuine. It reconciled me to my awkward position to be able to laugh at it.

"Had you been long there before you interposed?" she asked, after a pause. There was just a touch of anxiety in the question.

"Only a minute or two," I said. Seeing the thoughtful, anxious look on her face, I added that I came up just in time to hear the ruffian pass from begging to threatening. From motives of delicacy, I wished to suppress the fact that I had heard her exclamations of misery at his repeated interferences with her happiness. I was rewarded by seeing her countenance clear.

She sprung up quite lightly from her seat. "I had better make tracks for home now," she said. "He may come back."

"Since I have interposed," I said, "may I see you safely to Garacraig?"

"Certainly, Mr. Brown," she said, with a comic air of exaggerated politeness that made me smile in turn, thinking how odd these formal phrases sound when barbarous circumstances give them a real meaning.



## CHAPTER VI.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA.

FOR the first time in my life I found myself in the position of helping a woman in real and serious danger, and I was proud of it, proud of the chance of exercising the noblest privilege of the stronger sex, and determined to prove myself worthy of the opportunity.

It was a foolish feeling, no doubt, and looking back now, I wonder that there was not mixed with it some sense of my own presumption in thinking to act as champion to a woman so much my superior in—well I may say it, in age, for she must have been about thirty, and so very much my superior in experience of the world's ways. But the truth must be told that no thought of this disparity troubled me : I believe it rather contributed to my pride. I thought of her as a woman who had suffered, and who did not deserve to suffer. The bitter words I had heard her sob out rang in my ears as giving her a claim to pity and assistance from any man worthy of the name. I daresay there is something peculiarly attractive to young men in women of mercurial temperament. At any rate, her quick transitions of feeling puzzled



and at the same time fascinated me. The rapidity with which she had shaken off her fears and her anguish of hopeless complaint excited my admiration. Even the slang phrase she had used when she spoke of "making tracks" for home, struck no jarring note—it was spoken with such lightness and playfulness of tone. What courage the woman must have, I reflected, to face serious and immediate danger with such gayety of heart, and what a sense of *camaraderie* this little touch of familiarity established between us.

It was with unqualified admiration that I prepared to escort Mrs. Ingers back to Garacraig, ready to lend her all the support of my puissant arm, and to die in her defence if necessary.

But there was another awkward and somewhat perplexing incident before we got fairly underway.

I had forgotten all about the red flag in the excitement of what had happened, but as I climbed over the churchyard wall to join her—thinking this more courteous than to skirt the enclosure, and wait for her to join me at the other side—the red flag again caught my attention, and I remembered with some confusion that I had suspected it to be a signal between her and the convict. Looking at her, I observed that her eyes were also fixed upon it.

"I don't know what that can be," I said.

There was just a trace of hesitation before she answered. "It is my handkerchief; I had al-



most forgotten it. Let us go and fetch it, if it would not take you too much out of the way."

Her handkerchief! Then there had been a signal between them after all. But I was too happy in my duty to be much moved by this.

"The sandhills are rather troublesome to climb," I said. "I will run and bring it to you if you will wait here."

But she shuddered at the idea of remaining any longer alone in the churchyard with the day beginning to darken; so we descended the steps over the north wall, and climbed to the flag together. It stood, as I have already said, on the high mounds, covered with the long grass known as "bents," between the churchyard and the sea.

The pole of the flag was an ordinary hazel walking stick, but I was somewhat surprised to find that the red handkerchief, a bit of dainty silk, was attached to it by tapes, and that the tapes were sewn on to the handkerchief. The flying of the flag was evidently a premeditated thing. It must have been a signal after all.

Why, I asked myself did she not go home without taking any notice of it? I would not have spoken of it if she had not. I had no desire to pry into her secrets. It was very embarrassing.

I tried to conceal any appearance of surprise at the marks of premeditation, but she must have read my thoughts, for presently she said with a smile:



"You must think me a very eccentric person. But it was so dull here that I amused myself this afternoon by fancying myself alone on a desert island, and mounted this red handkerchief as a signal of distress to carry out the illusion. It was a foolish thing to do, for I believe it attracted the man here."

I was a little piqued that she should have so poor an opinion of my intelligence as to try to palm off such a tale upon me. I was pained, besides, that she should have condescended to it. I quite understood her motive. It was natural that she should try to disguise her previous acquaintance with the convict. But I already knew it, and attached no discredit to her on account of it: not only so, but in my indignation that so admirable a woman should be the victim of such a miscreant I was eager to be of service to her if I could in protecting her against his persecution. Had I not heard her say that he had ruined her life, and that this was the third time he had come between her and happiness? I was silent, therefore, for a little after she spoke, considering how best I could let her understand that I knew more than from motives of delicacy I had at first admitted, partly to save her the shame of committing herself to farther deceits, and partly with the hope that she might give me more of her confidence, and thus enable me more effectually to help her.



"I suppose," I said at length, taking up her remark that the flag might have attracted the man, "I suppose it was the convict of whom we were speaking the other day?"

"It was. At least, I believe so. He had close-cropped hair, and there were broad arrows on his clothes."

This was worse and worse. It pained me so that I felt I must undeceive her.

"I thought," I said, doing my best to preserve an indifferent tone, but feeling my face burn, "I thought from what I overheard that you must have met him before."

She gave me a sharp and suspicious look; but though there was some anger in her face, there was no trace of shame. I, on the other hand, was conscious of wearing an embarrassed and guilty look.

"You look," she said sharply, "as if you suspected me of being in league with this convict. Do you suppose that I deliberately made a signal to him?"

I am afraid I stammered a little in my answer, when the question was put to me so directly; but I contrived to say that it would be too absurd to suppose anything of the kind.

"Then what do you suppose?"

"I don't see my way to suppose anything. Only I can't understand why the flag should have



attracted him. I should have thought it would have frightened him away."

"Does it not occur to you as possible that he might have seen that there was only a woman beside the flag, and that he counted upon overpowering her if she did not give him what he wanted, which was probably money to help him to get away?"

"Quite so, of course," I said. "I see now."

I was hurt that she had not seen fit to give me more of her confidence, but my remembrance of her misery half an hour before far outweighed the effect of her disingenuousness, and I made every allowance for the motive to it. She had a perfect right to keep her secret if she chose so to do.

After we had secured the flag, she was still lingering on the sandy bluff, looking out to sea as if in admiration of the scene. It certainly was a lovely sight. The soft sheen of the great expanse of water in the waning light, here smooth as a millpond, there faintly ruffled, suffused with dark tints of purple and violet, was singularly beautiful. The yacht that I had seen as I came up was now nearer the shore, not more than half a mile out, tacking in-shore against the seaward breeze, with sails full set, but making little headway.

"How beautiful it is!" I said. I always *feel* the likeness of a ship to a sea-bird when I see one in the offing like that."

I looked at her when I said this. There was an



interest other than that of the beautiful in her look, a something markedly keen and practical.

"Yes," she said, "it is beautiful." But the words were purely mechanical. Her thoughts obviously did not go with them. She seemed to be trying to make out the vessel.

"You look," I said, with a laugh which I fear was somewhat forced, "as if you were still carrying out the illusion of being on a desert island. You are looking as I imagine you might look if you had descried a sail, and were watching eagerly to see whether it would come to your rescue."

"Am I? You see I have a glass, too," she said, producing a small opera-glass from her pocket. "The ship-wrecked mariner does not, as a rule, carry an opera-glass, I suppose. A long telescope would be more in keeping." She spoke lightly and with animation, as if the sight of the yacht had raised her spirits.

"What business is it of mine?" I thought to myself as I marked this farther evidence of premeditated outlook—for the convict as I supposed.

As she was adjusting her glass, I looked casually along the shore, trying to maintain my indifference. A boat on the beach some two hundred yards on the right arrested my attention.

We spoke at the same moment.

"Yes, it is. By Jove! There is the convict's boat."

"Where?" cried she.



"Then you know the yacht!" cried I.

And again our cross examinations were simultaneous.

I answered her query without waiting for an answer to mine, and pointed out the boat.

"It must be the boat he came by," I said; "the boat he stole from the beach. He came by a boat, did he not?"

"Yes," she said uncertainly.

"I had better go and secure it," I said, "and so cut off his retreat. He will be caught in a regular trap. He cannot run far in this open country without being caught." Although she had objected to my chasing him before, I could not suppose that she would have any objection to my crippling his power of movement by depriving him of his boat.

"As you please," she said. "But is it worth while to run the risk of being shot? He is armed, as I told you."

I hesitated for a moment. But fear of being thought a coward was stronger than fear of physical danger. I reflected, too, that the risk was not so great as it seemed; for once I got to the boat I could soon put myself out of reach of his revolver.

"Oh," I said jauntily, "there's not much danger. I ought to do it. It is a public duty." And I began to move down the sand slope to the beach.



But at that moment the convict himself appeared, walking rapidly, almost at a run, across the sands toward his boat.

"You are forestalled," she said, with a pleasant smile; "and I am glad of it. If anything had happened to you I should never have been able to avoid feeling that I was responsible. You needn't go farther, he would be out of reach long before you could get near him."

We watched the convict's movements for a little in silence. He was evidently a powerful ruffian. The sea had ebbed away several yards from the boat since he landed, but he seemed to find little difficulty in pushing it down through the sand; and once he was off he made it travel at a great pace with long sweeping strokes. He sculled it right across between us and the yacht. Two miles along the coast to the north of us began one range of precipitous rocks of which I have already spoken; the coast was similarly rocky and precipitous about a mile to the south. The links on which we stood formed the margin of a sandy bay, a break of two or more miles in the precipitous coastline. It was among the creeks and caves of the cliffs that a fugitive had best chance of concealment.

"I believe I see his game," I cried. "He is making for the rocks on the north."

I turned as I said this. She made no answer,



She was scanning the yacht intently through her glass.

"So you know the yacht?" I said, recurring to her ejaculation a few minutes before.

"Yes," she said simply; "it is Mr. Wood's *Foambell*."

She said this in the most ordinary tone, as if the appearance of the yacht there was entirely accidental. To me the recognition suggested another possible meaning of the red flag and the opera-glass with which she had come provided. The flag might not have been a signal to the convict after all.

But I resolved that I would ask no questions, and would avoid as far as possible showing the least curiosity. If she was willing to give me her confidence, well and good; if not, I would not solicit it in any way.

She continued to watch the yacht through her glass.

Suddenly she exclaimed, "They are putting off a boat from the yacht."

"Are they?" I answered, and had almost made a movement to hold out my hand for the glass before I could check myself. "Are they?" Perhaps they mean to give chase to the convict. It should be a close race if they try to cut him off from the rocks. In what direction does the boat seem to be steering?" I asked, after a moment.



"I can't make out," she said, handing the glass to me.

"I believe," I said after a minute's observation, "that they are steering to cut him off."

Presently we saw the convict cease rowing and look in the direction of the boat. He remained for a minute or two in close observation, apparently making up his mind what to do; then he rowed rapidly back across the line between us and them, and beached his boat 300 yards or so on the right at a spot not far from where he had launched it. He pushed it up the sands a bit and disappeared among the sand-dunes at a run.

"They will get the boat now, at any rate," I remarked.

"Your sympathies evidently go with the pursuer and not with the pursued," she said, in a laughing tone, but her features twitched so that she could hardly command them. She was evidently disappointed, but whether it was because the fugitive had not been caught at once or because his capture could now be only a matter of time, I was unable to divine.

"I never thought of it before," I said, "but it does look as if my sympathies were with law and order."

"For my part," she said, "I can never see any creature chased without hoping that it may outrun its pursuers and get clear off. It is very foolish, I dare say."



"I don't know about its being foolish," I said, "but it does seem a somewhat immoral instinct, when the thing chased is a fugitive from justice."

"Is a criminal, then, so very different from other human beings?"

Of course it occurred to me that he was at least so far different that he had broken the law and must take the consequences. I saw what she was driving at, that any of us might have committed the same crime if we had the same temptations. That might be very true, but it was no reason why I should not desire to see a convict run to earth who had knocked down a warder and run off. But Mrs. Ingers asked her question with just a grain of contempt in her voice, and I did not care to argue with her. Was she foolish enough, I asked myself, still to care for this man who, according to her own angry reproach, had ruined her life? If she was, I could only pity her, and take it as an example of the blind constancy of woman, a quality more to be respected than blamed.

The boat from the yacht was nearing the shore rapidly. It did not follow the convict. It was making straight for us, and I remarked the fact. Further, when we began to move away, the man at the rudder seemed to signal to us to stop. We stopped accordingly, I at least in some wonder as to what was to happen next.

What happened was that one of the men jumped out of the boat and came towards us with



a letter in his hand, and asked the lady whether she was Mrs. Ingers. On being answered in the affirmative, he delivered the letter to her. She read it with studiously impassive face, which I must confess I stole a glance at, though I tried hard to look indifferently at the landscape.

She had a little gold pencil-case along with some other trinkets at her waist, and she wrote a few words of reply on a bit of the envelope, which she twisted artistically into the form of a three-cornered note.

He went straight back to the boat, and as soon as he was in they pushed off and steered straight for the yacht.

"Hi!" I cried. "Do you know that the man in the boat is the runaway convict from Skate-ness?"

"What business is it of ours?" asked Mrs. Ingers, with a sharpness that startled me.

The men fortunately did not hear my words, but they stopped rowing to listen. It was awkward rather for me. "Beg your pardon. All right," I shouted. "The note will explain everything."



## CHAPTER VII.

## SOME CLEVER MANŒUVERING.

THE sun had gone down, and several more folds of the "gradual dusky veil" of evening had fallen when we again set out for Garacraig after this episode.

Mrs. Ingers seemed to feel that she must make some amends for the abruptness of the check she had given me when I called to the boatmen of the yacht.

"I hope you will forgive me," she said, turning to me with a very captivating smile, "for speaking as I did. Of course you must know better what ought to be done than a poor woman like me. But why should we interfere with the man's chances of escaping?"

"As you please," I said. "It is a matter of indifference to me, as long as you are out of danger."

"Oh, I am quite safe now," she said cheerfully. "If he does not attack us, we may as well let him alone."

We had descended from the high mounds, and were walking now on the soft turf of the grassy flat between the sand-dunes and the cornland. The twilight lay deeper in the hollow, and the



boom of the sea sounded solemnly through it. The rustle of my companion's dress on the grass was distinctly audible above the dull beat of our almost noiseless steps. I broke the silence with an effort.

"You are too tender-hearted," I said. "I confess I should like to see the scoundrel in the grasp of the law again."

"Why so vindictive?" she said. "What do you know about him? He will probably be caught to-morrow without your doing constable's work."

What did I know about him? Should I tell her what I had heard? Here was another opportunity, almost an invitation.

"I know," I began, "that he—"

But unluckily, as I turned my face to her to watch the effect of my words, my foot caught in something and I stumbled forward. Apparently Mrs. Ingers had a keen sense of the ridiculous, for a laugh broke from her, instantaneously and irresistibly mirthful. In another instant she also tripped and stumbled, and her laugh passed into a nervous scream of surprise and fright. She involuntarily caught hold of my arm, when a hoarse voice a few yards on our right called to us—

"Look out there! You've broken my net, I believe."

I confess I was a little startled myself; but dusk as it was I soon recognized the owner of the



voice and understood what had happened. It was Sandy Leiper, a molecatcher and notorious poacher of the district, and we had stumbled against the nets which he was getting ready for his poaching operations. He was partly hid by one of the hillocks, and we had been too engrossed in our talk to observe him as we came up. The nets which he was engaged in straightening were hardly distinguishable in the dim light till we knew that they were there.

"All right, Sandy," I called to him. "There's nothing broken." I had known him well in my school-boy days, and been instructed by him in the rudiments of flying fishing and rabbit-snaring. I had even been sufficiently in his confidence to be allowed to help him in putting his nets in order at the appropriate season.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Maister Brown?" returned Sandy coolly. "I suppose I needn't ask you to give me a hand to-night?"

"No, thank you," I replied, and we passed on.

I mention this incident because, as I afterwards discovered, our local smuggler and poacher was at that very time acting in concert with the fugitive convict and helping him in his efforts to escape. His work upon the nets, which he was in the habit of doing openly as if they were fishing-nets, was only a pretext. The fugitive was in hiding among the rocks, in a retreat that Sandy had shown him, and the convict had come to meet him by appoint-



ment in order to get some materials for disguise when he accidentally encountered Mrs. Ingers. All this I learnt from Sandy Leiper afterwards. When I asked the poacher where he first met the fugitive and why he helped him, Sandy told me that he met him on the evening of the day of his escape prowling about the links. It will be remembered that the authorities judged that he had fled northward, and searched in that direction first ; he had really rowed southward. As to his motive for helping an escaped convict, Sandy could give no clear account. "The chiel seemed terrible hard pressed," was all I could get out of him. I am afraid that Sandy was not, like myself, on the side of law and order. His sympathies went the other way ; the police were his natural enemies.

To return, however, to my escorting of Mrs. Ingers.

She had taken my arm when first startled by stumbling against the net, and she retained it while we resumed our walk homewards.

"You seem fated to be my champion to-night," she said, in a soft tone. "I should have been very much frightened if I had encountered that man alone. What is he? You seem to know him."

I explained to her Sandy's ostensible avocation, and how he was suspected of eking out his living by unlawful means. "You see," I said, "that



quiet parish though it is, we have our desperate characters. Sandy Leiper is our heroic outlaw. We boys used to have a great respect for him. There was no depth of law-breaking that we did not believe him capable of, and yet somehow he never got into trouble, and was on good enough terms outwardly with both the exciseman and the gamekeeper. He was, and I believe is, very popular in the parish, being a generally obliging and handy fellow, besides being indispensable for rats and moles. Sandy and I were always very good friends. I was rather a favorite with him, and very proud of his patronage."

"Friends with a poacher and a smuggler!" said Mrs. Ingers slyly. "I thought you considered that all such lawless characters should be hunted down."

I made a feeble effort to defend my consistency, but the truth is I was inwardly foolish enough to be very much pleased that Mrs. Ingers should not think of me as too stiff a stickler for dull and steady legality—as the most odious of characters to young men, a regular prig. And what is more, I believe she knew this. Looking back now upon our talk that evening, as we walked in the dusk toward Garacraig, I believe that she deliberately laid herself out to befool me, with, I am bound to admit, a large measure of success. That she had then formed the plan for turning my devotion to account, as she afterwards did, I can hardly



suppose. I am inclined to think that that grew out of subsequent circumstances. They say that some women are so fond of power and homage that they cannot meet any man without trying more or less to make a favorable impression on him, and attach him to their ear. Probably Mrs. Ingers had no more definite motive than this for trying to make a conquest of poor me; it was probably force of temperament and habit. She had had no male creature to subdue for several weeks, and her appetite for conquest must have been proportionately keen. Possibly, too, she may have been like a prudent diplomatist, who misses no opportunity of making a fresh adherent, though he may not see at the moment precisely what use to make of him.

Our stumbling into the poacher's net had interrupted me when I was about to tell her what I had overheard at the churchyard. I waited for her to resume the subject. I was scrupulously anxious not to appear inquisitive about her affairs, more particularly after I had seen the communication between her and the yacht, and her saying that she was out of danger now. Apparently the only service she needed was a safe escort to Garacraig.

Naturally I could not help thinking a good deal as we walked along. So much indeed was I perplexed, and, in spite of myself, busy with conjectures, that much as I tried I could find nothing



to say on any other topic. She broke a somewhat protracted silence by suddenly making a request.

"I want you," she said, "to say nothing about all this to our friends at the Manse."

"The request is quite unnecessary, Mrs. Ingres," I answered, in rather a grand way. "What I have seen and heard, I have seen and heard, as an involuntary intruder, and I should no more think of making use of it, even in the way of gossip, than of appropriating money that I found on another person's table."

"That is very chivalrous," she said.

"It is only common honesty."

"Ah, but there are not many people like that ; at least it has not been my fortune to meet them. I really don't deserve it."

"You do yourself injustice," I answered. I had, I confess, been somewhat chilled by the message from the yacht, and her perfect silence about it ; but I had still a vivid recollection of her persecution by Roper, and her generosity in wishing him to get off after all.

"And you say this after what you heard?"

"I only heard that your life had been very unhappy, and that this scoundrel whom you wish to let off has been the cause of it."

"Unhappy!" she cried, ignoring the second part of my remark. "Yes. How I envy a quiet, even, untroubled life ; such a life, now, as your



cousin Mary Brown lives, with her regular house duties, and her books, and her garden to look after, and her dairy, and her old and infirm people to see to and to look up to her as a Lady Bountiful. Ah, it is a Paradise lost to me. I have always longed for such a life. It is my envy."

I was astonished at this outburst. The speaker's tones left me in no doubt as to her sincerity.

"But why," I asked, "should you not lead such a life if you desire it?"

"Ah," she said, "you cannot understand. One must be born to it. I have always been in trouble since I married. My father meant it for the best. He was always in trouble himself, poor man. You don't think any the worse of me for what you heard, do you?"

"Why should I? I heard nothing except that you have been the victim of an odious persecution And I still regret—"

"I know," she said. "But that message from the sea—did it not strike you as a little mysterious? I must give you the credit," she continued in a lighter tone, "of having looked most absolutely unconcerned, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world that a lady should receive a letter in that way. You could not have looked more politely unconscious of anything strange if I had received a note from the postman."

And she could not have spoken in a lighter tone if we had been chaffing one another in a drawing-



room. Her rapid changes of mood were incomprehensible to me, yet they came with such a rush that I was carried away with the torrent, naturally phlegmatic as I am.

"After all, Mrs. Ingers," I said, "to quote your own words, what concern was it of mine?"

"But supposing it had been a concern of yours," she persisted, "what would you have thought? Would you have thought that I had unusual powers of acting upon other minds at a distance?"

"I am a plain, prosaic person," I answered gravely, "and not at all imaginative. If you wish really to know, I will confess that I was inclined to think that when you put up that red handkerchief, you had some reason to believe that Mr. Wood's yacht was somewhere in the neighborhood."

She did not take this prosaic suggestion by any means amiss; on the contrary, she laughed at it heartily. When her mirth had subsided, she asked me whether I had seen any of the publications of the Psychical Research Society.

I said I had not, and thereupon she offered to lend me a volume which contained, she said, some very curious facts. "I am not at all a clever person myself," she said; "but I should like to know what a really able man thinks of them."

This was tolerably strong flattery, but I confess that I was so pleased with my companion that I swallowed it with something like delight. I considered it necessary, however, to maintain my



character as a hard-headed person, not easily imposed upon, so I remarked that perhaps I should explain the facts by denying them to be facts.

"Oh, but they are thoroughly well authenticated," she said.

We had reached the porch of Garacraig House by this time. "Come in and see," she said.

We went in, and she submitted several cases to me from the precious volumes. She seemed to have them at her fingers' ends. It was evidently a favorite study with her. I observed the signature of "G. S. Wood," on the cover of one of the books.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

How long we remained over this to me interesting comparison of ideas I do not know. I did not look at my watch when we went in, nor did I look at it before I came out. All I know is that it was thick dusk when we went in, and that when I came out it was so dark among the trees that at first I could hardly distinguish the road, and felt my way by the crunching of the gravel under my feet.

There were three ways back to the Manse. I chose the longest. Mrs. Ingers was the most interesting woman I had ever met. The meditative mood in which I had sought the shore had given place to another, equally absorbing, but much more tumultuous. I crunched along the gravelled drive under the trees in a state of foolish, indefinite excitement, my brain stirred as it had never been before by a throng of new and wonderful experiences. I felt like a traveller over the sea of life who had landed on a strange shore, and had spent the day in explorations, every step of which had brought fresh marvels before his eyes. Amidst so much that was new and strange and perplexing



my mind could not fasten upon any one particular; but the combined effect of all was a turbulent elevation of spirit. When I came out from among the trees into the open, I cast my eyes freely over the darkened land and up to the pale blue sky, with its dim stars, full of vague exultation, as one who had obtained a new experience of the richness and fulness of life. And before my mental vision ever kept flashing with singular distinctness the face of Mrs. Ingers in some one of its many changes. I could not fix it in one aspect; but one after another flashed upon me vividly and went; and I heard in the same involuntary fashion tone after tone of her thrilling voice in its swift transitions from grief to gayety. There was a strange sense of something witch-like in these rapid mental transformations of the sprightly dame: she was as the sybil who had conducted me through new regions of spiritual experience.

I must have been very much preoccupied, for I had walked nearly a mile before I became aware of a vague want which ultimately culminated in the discovery that I was not smoking. Here was an earthy descent from the heights to which I had been transported, a sudden, plump, sobering fall. I put my hand in the pocket of my ulster to feel for my pipe. It was not there. Mechanically I felt in another pocket, nothing doubting that I should put my hand upon it. It was not there either, and I stood in some alarm and made a



rapid and thorough search. It was not upon my person at all.

Nobody but a smoker can understand my consternation. Not only was it a favorite pipe, but it was the only pipe I had brought to the country with me. I should be thrown back upon the local clays, and should have to wait some time before I could get one of them.

Of course I reflected upon the folly and absurdity of being so dependent on a dirty habit. I did not spare my own weakness, you may be sure, and read myself a lecture against the petty vice that the most violent anti-tobacconist could not have improved upon. I even resolved to take this as a warning and an opportunity, and from that moment to shake myself free from the degrading servitude.

But I had not walked many steps in the full strength of this resolution, when all of a sudden I remembered what I had done with the missing briar. I had put it away in the porch of Garacraig House as I entered. I remembered depositing it in a flower-pot, and amusing myself at the time with a little quip that came into my head that flowers love the weed.

And remembering what I had done with it, I thought I might as well recover it. I would prove my strength of will by not smoking it, but I would recover it. This would be much more meritorious than merely not smoking because I had nothing



to smoke. To have the pipe and not to smoke it would be a veritable triumph of will over inclination. I had no desire to go indoors yet. I knew that my uncle never went to bed till twelve at the earliest, so that I would have no difficulty in getting into the Manse. Out in the open under an unclouded sky there was just light enough for me with careful peering, to make out the hands of my watch: it was close on eleven.

There were, as I have said, three ways from Garacraig to the Manse. One was the gravelled drive and the turnpike by which I had come, a distance of a mile and a half. A path through the glen of the Garvalt Water, included in the pleasure grounds of the house, cut off half a mile. I was now near the point where the turnpike crossed the glen, and I could go back that way. And once I had secured my pipe, there was a still nearer way to the Manse—round by the back of Garacraig House, through a plantation which covered the stables and farm-buildings, and across a field. I could easily be at the Manse by this way long before twelve. Had I been in a less elevated state of mind I should have hesitated to go through the dark glen. But in my present mood I had no fear of any hostile shape of ghostly or fleshly substance that might lie in wait behind corners or in dark recesses. There was a time when the glen was full of such monsters for me after dark, and I was a little astonished and very much pleased at



my own boldness now. I climbed the wall with a light heart, and plunged fearlessly into the thick gloom, the rush of the water filling the air with confident music, where once it had distracted my ears with vague terrors.

I executed the first part of my purpose easily, keeping cautiously on the grass till I reached the porch, and making as little noise as I could, lest the inmates of the house should not have gone to bed. In order to get round to the back of the house, I had now to turn a corner and pass the window of the parlor where Mrs. Ingers had received me. This window looked out upon a lawn over which I could tread noiselessly enough, but there was a bit of the drive to be traversed before I turned the corner, and over this it would not be easy to keep my footsteps from being audible. Therefore I cautiously coasted the grass on the off-side of the drive, meaning to come within sight of the window before I ventured to set foot on the treacherous gravel. I thought I might be able to cross it a little distance off without making noise enough to attract attention.

Yes; there was light in the parlor. A belt of light from the window streamed across the lawn, caught a hedge of shrubs a few yards off, and went searching through the trees beyond. Only for a moment, however, did my eyes follow its course, looking automatically for a spot where it might be crossed with safety. Only for a moment



did my eyes take this direction, in obedience to the idea that was in my head when I turned the corner. In another instant they were fixed on a figure that stood right in the light in front of the window, and seemed from its attitude to be reaching forward to tap on the glass.

Presently I heard the tapping begin, and immediately after a suppressed scream.

It was undoubtedly the convict; I at once recognized the scarecrow dress and the big figure, looking still larger in the belt of light that streamed from the window, and throwing a huge shadow behind him on the green sward. My heart beat fast as I grasped my stick firmly and prepared to advance stealthily on him from behind.

"Don't be frightened, Lorry," I heard him say; "it's only me, Arthur Roper."

What she said in answer I did not hear; but as I crossed the gravel with extremest caution, taking care to move each step as he was in the act of speaking, I heard him pleading with her and apparently receiving rebuff after rebuff.

"I want you to help me, of course."

"Oh yes, you promised me money. To-morrow at two; I have not forgotten."

"I want clothes; I can't go far in these togs."

"There must be some of Ingers's in the house."

"Don't be hard on a fellow, Lorry; I'm in a devil of a scrape."



"I'm your cousin after all, and we were once good friends."

"Oh yes ; but I can explain all that. You were in a dreadful wax this afternoon, and wouldn't hear me."

"Open the window, and I'll clear all that up."

"No ; I won't go away, not till you have heard me. Where am I to go to?"

"No ; you won't raise the house."

"All right, do. I can't be worse than I am."

He rather raised his voice as he said this, and the window was hurriedly opened. It was a French window, opening on to the lawn.

He made a step forward, and put one foot on the sill, but drew back with an oath. I could see the clear barrel of a revolver gleaming in the light ; he had almost touched it.

"Will you go away now, you miserable coward?" I could not see her face, her back being to the light ; but her attitude, as she stood in the window, was firm and commanding. "Do you think to bully me ? Go away, or I will shoot you like a dog, and end this persecution."

She spoke in a low, distinct voice.

"Shoot," he answered sullenly. "As well be shot as hanged. It would be rather a lark to be shot by you."

For a moment she looked as if she would do it. Then she relented, or her curiosity got the better of her, and she said :



"You spoke of explaining your infamous conduct. How can you do that?"

"It was not my doing; it was the lawyer fellow's—him who defended me at the trial—entirely his idea. He said it was the only way to get me off. You were the only other person that could have altered the figures on the check. If you didn't do it it must have been me, and the lawyer hinted that it was you accordingly."

"But why did you let him? Why did you not speak out yourself?"

"I thought you couldn't be punished for altering a cheque drawn by your husband."

"Did the lawyer tell you this too?"

"Well, he never said you could. You are a oner to cross-examine, Lorry. Don't be hard on a poor fellow. Of course I did my best to get off. —It was only natural, and I've suffered for it."

"And was the other thing the lawyer's invention?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know—that there had been something between us."

"That was none of my doing."

"You swear that?"

"My Bible oath on it. That was his idea, every bit, and I took nothing by it, blast him, but an extra couple of years, for the Beak was down on me hard for trying to spoil your character."

Mrs. Ingers seemed to be impressed by what



he had said, for she lowered her revolver, and stood for a minute or two in a thoughtful posture with her left hand raised to her chin. Then she spoke.

“What is it that you want me to do now? I have promised to give you money to-morrow. I will do so. But it is not here. I will send for it in the morning; what more do you want?”

“I want to know what’s up between you and that yacht. I saw your flag, and I saw you get a letter.”

She turned upon him angrily and raised her revolver again. “Understand me,” she said. “I have listened to you about yourself, but I will have no meddling with my affairs. Begin anything of the kind again and you go; if you don’t, I will defend myself with this.”

The ruffian was cowed, and no wonder, for there was a dangerous frenzy in her voice, and I expected every instant that her excitement would pass beyond her control. I heard Roper mutter in a grumbling tone:

“Easy, easy. Easy does it. You needn’t be so waxy.”

“What more do you want, then?”

“I want some of Ingers’s togs. I can’t get off in this sort of rig.”

“Why do you use that hateful prison slang?” she said, with a feminine impatience of an odious trifle so odd in the circumstances that, serious as



the situation was, I could not keep from smiling at it. "Have you sunk so low as to have forgotten the language of a gentleman?"

"It may come back with the clothes," he muttered sulkily.

"Wait here, then, till I see what I can get."

I could not be mistaken; there was actually a trace of amusement in her voice. She added in sterner tones,

"Don't dare enter till I come back."

"You may as well give me a razor if you can find one," were the impudent rascal's last words as she shut the window.

While this dialogue was in progress I had contrived to cross the gravel walk. After the way in which she had checked my attempts at interference in the afternoon, I considered it wise to keep in the background; but I held myself ready to rush forward on the slightest sign that she needed my assistance. It was so dark among the trees that I ran no risk of being seen by them, more particularly as they were standing in the light, but for better security I availed myself of the shelter of a yew tree which stood within a dozen yards or so of the window.

I kept my station after Mrs. Ingers had gone in, resolved to see him safely away from the house. In about ten minutes she returned, and handed him what looked like a Gladstone bag. "It is a bag of my husband's," she said, "which came



among my things by mistake. You will find there what you want."

This matter-of-fact statement was such a change from the tragic strain of a few minutes before that again I was inclined to laugh, and my risibility was increased when the ruffian shouldered the bag with the remark:

"Thanks very much, Lorry; I shall travel now like a mob."

The comic incongruity of the strangely mixed scene continued to haunt me as I hurried home to the Manse by the shortest cut.

I may add here that what I had heard at the window induced me after I returned to London to hunt up the report of Roper's trial in the file of the local newspaper preserved in the British Museum. It was tolerably plain what his offence had been, but it may satisfy the curiosity of others, as it satisfied mine, to know some of the circumstances.

The charge against Roper was forging or uttering, knowing to have been forged, two cheques drawn by Mr. Ingers. The cheques were drawn to "self or bearer," and had been given to Mrs. Ingers for her personal expenses. The amount was originally £8 (eight pounds); but a cipher had been added to the 8 and a *y* to the eight before the cheques were presented at the bank.

Roper, who was admitted to have presented the cheques, was charged with the forgery. His



defence was that he had received the cheques as he presented them from Mrs. Ingers. The lady was put into the witness-box, and fiercely and relentlessly examined by Roper's counsel in support of this contention. The examination was reported in full ; it had evidently been a sensational case, and will no doubt still be remembered by many who read this. She was asked if Roper was her cousin ; if she had known him before her marriage ; if she had continued the intimate acquaintance after marriage ; if he had often been in the house during her husband's absence ; if she had ever given him money before the two cheques to help him out of his difficulties ; if she had begged her husband not to prosecute him. Mrs. Ingers had admitted all this. The vile insinuation was obvious, and the judge had interfered, and put a direct question to the lady, to which she had given an indignant denial. Evidently her demeanor in the witness-box had made a most favorable impression. I heard Roper say that he had gained nothing by his line of defence. This was quite true : the judge, in summing up, had characterized it as infamous, and in all probability it had increased, as Roper believed, the severity of the sentence.



## CHAPTER IX.

## A COMPROMISING SITUATION.

NEXT morning, immediately after breakfast, I walked across to the doctor's for the newspaper, and read the latest news about the chase of the convict to my aunt and Mary, not without a certain secret sense of superiority in virtue of my more recent knowledge of his movements.

They had heard from my uncle about the lateness of my return, and I had had to bear a good deal of chaff from Mary as to the profundity and extent and probable result of the portentous "think" in which I had engaged by the lonely sea. Mary was a well-read girl, and she reminded me of the lonely meditations and high resolves of Warren Hastings when he was a boy, and told me that if this tremendous "think" of mine did not lead to my becoming at least Governor-General of India she would consider it had been entirely wasted, or at least that the deliberation and the result were utterly disproportionate. I bore her chaff with great good humor, and replied as well as I could; and finding myself tormented by a desire to tell her what I had really been doing, raised the question for her which of two things



gives the greatest pleasure, to know a secret or to tell a secret. Mary answered at once that to know a secret without being able to tell must be a very barren satisfaction, or even a positive pain, unless you can torture other people by giving them to understand that you know but will not tell. Even in that case you lay yourself open to the annoyance of being taunted with only pretending to know, a taunt which you can meet only by telling. All which looked as if the advantage lay with telling a secret ; but I argued, on the other hand, that once you part with your secret you part with your sense of superiority over other people.

“All this,” said Mary, “looks very profound, my dear George, but it only means that when you have eaten your cake you part with your sense of superiority in having a cake to eat. All the same, there is an undeniable pleasure in eating a cake ; so if you have a secret to tell, George, out with it.”

I have always admired Mary’s cleverness, and never began a discussion with her without finding to my cost that I had a much slower and more creeping intellect. It would have taken me hours to work out that parallel between the cake and the secret, let alone the practical application.

Of course I protested that I had raised the question *à propos* of nothing in particular ; but I could see that she was sceptical.



Her scepticism grew to acute suspicion when a few minutes afterwards the housemaid announced that there was a groom from Garacraig House at the door with a message for me.

I tried hard to take this as a matter of course, but I fear not with entire success. My cousin raised her hands in open and undisguised wonder.

"Are you sure there is no mistake?" she asked of the housemaid. "Are you sure the man did not mean my father? There are two Mr. Browns in the house, you know."

"He said young Mr. Brown from London, please ma'am," returned the maid.

"Well, that was clear enough. This is rather suspicious, my young man," she added, turning to me. "Of course it is *à propos* of nothing in particular."

I gave a grin which I meant to be tantalizing, but which may have been a little embarrassed, and hurried out.

The groom had come with a letter, which he had been instructed to deliver into my own hands. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR MR. BROWN,

"Can you look in at Garacraig in the course of the day? I forgot to draw your attention to quite the most interesting case of all.

"Yours very truly,

"LAURA INGERS."



"What a woman!" I exclaimed to myself admiringly, when I had read this. "Last night brought to bay by a ruffian and prepared to defend herself with a revolver, and this morning prepared to discuss ghosts, dreams, presentiments, and so forth, as eagerly, no doubt, as if such questions were her wildest excitement."

I decided to start off at once. To tell the truth, I was afraid to encounter again the cross-examination of my mercilessly inquisitive cousin. But just as I was taking my walking-stick out of the umbrella-stand she darted out upon me.

"Well, George, what is it? What does she want?"

"Oh, nothing particular," I answered carelessly; "only spooks."

"What's spooks?"

"Spooks," I answered solemnly, "is a scientific word derived from the Greek, and signifies spirits."

"But isn't it rather too early in the day for that sort of thing?"

I laughed mysteriously.

"You don't mean to say that she has sent a special message to you upon such slight acquaintance to ask you to drop in for a friendly glass before midday?"

I laughed again.

"George," she cried impatiently, "what do you



mean? Do you mean to insinuate with your spooks that Mrs. Ingers drinks?"

I hastened to explain that I meant another kind of spirit—disembodied spirits, separable souls, ghosts, goblins, and suchlike.

"And what does she want you to do with her spooks, as you call them? Does she keep a menagerie of them? Have they mutinied? If they have, I should have thought my father would have seemed a more likely person to put them down."

"I may as well show you her letter," I said thoughtlessly. My mind was full of the convict, as the point in my relations with Mrs. Ingers that had to be kept dark; and as the note said nothing about him, I thought there could be no harm in showing it, and at the same time the action would look frank and open, and would disarm suspicion.

But the moment I saw her face lighting up, as she bent it over the letter, I felt that I had acted hastily, and without due consideration of the diabolical perspicacity of women.

Mary read the letter aloud slowly, with special emphasis on the words "*I forgot to draw your attention;*" and when she had done she raised her eyes and her eyebrows, and said, "When did you have this conversation with Mrs. Ingers about spooks? It was not in my presence."

"Oh, the other day," I said; and fled, leaving



behind me an explanation that I would tell her all about it at lunch, and must go at once, in order to be back in time.

As I shut the garden gate I could hear her pursuing me with the remark that evidently the public service was not favorable to the practice of straightforward truth.

Mrs. Ingers received me with a glad and eager welcome, as if I were an old friend opportunely arriving in a moment of difficulty. "So you got my note!" she said. "I am so glad you have come. I want very much to see you."

I was so put off my balance by this reception that I hardly knew what to say. I believe I muttered something about her sending for me being an honor.

"Well, let us proceed to business," she said cheerfully, turning her chair round from an escritoire at which she had been busy with her correspondence. There was an assumption of a lawyer-like air in the words and gesture that tickled me. I was soon to be reduced to a graver frame of mind.

"One moment," I said. "Pray understand that I know so little about psychical research that I am not really worthy of being consulted on anything connected with the subject."

Her brows knit for an instant, as if she did not comprehend what I was referring to. Then she



broke into the catching laugh of involuntary mirth that I had observed before when she was detected in a little artifice.

"Oh yes," she said, "my letter. I put that in my letter lest your cousin should make you show it to her. But of course I am not so deeply interested in psychical research as all that."

Soon her expression changed, and she said in an earnest voice, and with a searching, half-distrustful look, "You volunteered yesterday to do me a service if I wanted it. I do want help now, sorely."

I did not remember making a distinct offer of service, but I had certainly felt like it, and I said at once, "Anything that I can do I will do most gladly."

"Wait till you hear what it is," she said, with a sad smile, still looking at me dubiously, though apparently pleased with my earnestness.

"I think I can guess," I answered impetuously "You want me to help you in getting rid of the persecution of that man Roper, the convict."

She started, and as she took her arm off the escritoire to lean forward towards me I saw that it trembled. "What made you think of that?" she asked, and waited for an answer with lips a little parted and brows slightly contracted.

"I heard what passed between you last night," I said frankly, wishing to save her the trouble of explanation.



"Yesterday afternoon, you mean. But I understood you to say that you did not hear much." She looked at me suspiciously.

"I mean last night," I answered; "here, on the lawn outside, at this window." She started to her feet in indignant surprise. In a moment I saw, though too late, that I had made a mistake. I was so full of the conviction that she had been wronged and was being persecuted that I had forgotten how I obtained my knowledge.

"This is very strange, Mr. Brown," she said, when at last she found words, with difficulty commanding her voice. "It seems that you have been dogging me—shadowing me, I think the phrase is, playing the eavesdropper. To what do I owe this strange attention? Was it purely disinterested curiosity, or are you employed to do it? And you looked so artless and honest too!"

Had I been perfectly cool and collected I might have put a sinister construction upon this quick fear of espionage as implying that there was something to hide. But in the ardor of my championship I only took it as another proof of the injustice to which the unfortunate woman had been subjected. Her wrongs had made her suspicious.

"Believe me," I said, rising and making a step towards her as she sat at the escritoire with her chin resting on her hand, "believe me it was purely accidental." And I explained how I had



gone out on the first occasion without the slightest expectation of finding her by the shore, and how I had come back on the second occasion thinking that at the utmost I should see nothing but the light from her window, and taking every precaution to avoid disturbing her.

"It is a very plausible story," she said, after listening to my explanation in silence ; "but how am I to believe it?"

Her tone was less cutting than before, and this hopeful sign that I might be able to put myself right with her betrayed me into another confession, which I now see to have been precipitate and ill-judged.

"I can only give you my word of honor," I said ; "and as the strongest proof of my sincerity I will confess that I did come down here with some thought of playing the spy upon you in a sort of way."

I smiled as I said this. "Indeed !" she said, in a tone of bitter resignation. "How was that? But," she added haughtily, again rising to her feet, "I have no right to your confidence, and do not desire it."

I felt humiliated, and more anxious than before to put myself right. She looked superb as she stood there at her full height, her queenly features full of cold defiance. I thought of the courage with which she had overawed her midnight visitor.

"You may not desire it," I said, with abject



earnestness ; but you have every right to my confidence, and to an apology also, for I did you wrong, and it would ease my conscience to make confession."

" Proceed with it," she said, " since you wish it."

" Well, then," I plunged on, " I happened a fortnight ago to hear of a lady so fascinating and so fond of conquest over men's hearts that she would be certain to make a commotion wherever she went. I had some reason to suspect that this might be the lady who had taken Garacraig House, and this was partly the reason why I came here."

She smiled bitterly. Still, it was a smile. She walked to the window and looked out. Finding that I did not go on, she turned and said in a somewhat contemptuous tone, " Is that all ? Surely your explanation is rather lame, Mr. Brown ! I do not quite see as yet what was your object in coming. Did you wish to submit your noble self to this fascinating person and defy her to make an impression on you ?"

" Oh no," I said, " I have no pretensions to being worthy of such an experiment."

" Then, what was your object ?"

I was fairly cornered. I could not have given a very clear account of my object 'to myself ; how then could I express it to her ? And yet I had floundered like a fool into confessing that I had



some purpose in coming after her. I blushed violently, and plunged and stammered on—

“The person who mentioned this lady to me was talking of books and the strange things to be found in them, and he said that stranger things were to be found in real life, and that novelists had only to use their faculties of observation—”

At this she laughed outright. “Ah, I see now. You were stalking me to put me into a book. Well, do I come up to your expectations? I thought you scribblers spun everything out of your beads. But I am very glad if I can save you the trouble of invention.”

“Mrs. Ingers,” I protested, “I had no such idea in my head. When I spoke of playing the spy, I did not mean spying upon you in a literal sense. It was more to humor your phrase that I repeated it than because it described accurately anything that was in my own thoughts.”

“Then what was in your thoughts?”

“Only a vague curiosity to be on the spot where ~~this~~ fascinating woman was to exercise her charms, near the scene of the—the—”

“Tragedy,” she suggested, with another scornful laugh.

“Tragedy or comedy,” I said hurriedly; “I had no very clear idea, though you look more like a tragic heroine now. But I had not been half-an-hour in your company when I despised myself for



my impertinence, and now I find my apish curiosity changed into the profoundest pity."

"Pity?" she echoed, flashing up again. "I am much obliged to you, Mr. Brown."

"No, no," I cried, losing my temper a little at her perversity, "not pity. I seem always to stumble on the wrong word. Not pity. Say rather sorrow, infinite sorrow, that so divine a creature, whose progress through the world ought to be a continuous triumph, should be harassed and dragged down by an odious and vulgar persecution, should be blackmailed by a convict. I feel the iniquity and enormity of this, and would give worlds to be the means of putting a stop to it."

I spoke vehemently, and I could see her color come and go under my words. She turned away and looked out of the window.

Presently she faced me again and said, "Who would have thought you had so much fire?" She tried to speak in a light and jesting tone, but I could see her lips quiver.

"Believe me, Mrs. Ingers," I continued solemnly, "I had no thought of playing the spy when I heard what I did hear. But I heard nothing that was not to your honor."

She looked steadily at me and tried to say something in reply, but her voice choked, and after trying in vain for a moment to command it she sunk upon an ottoman, covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly.



"You are too good," she sobbed. "You are a poet, and see things as they ought to be, not as they are. I am not the heroine that you fancy. O that I were! O that I had my life to live over again!"

"Mrs. Ingers," I said respectfully, touched by her ardent anguish, "you do yourself injustice." It was the second time I had made this protest.

"Don't!" cried. "O pray don't, don't speak in that way! I cannot bear it!" And she sobbed more convulsively than before.

I did not know what to say or what to do. I paced the room in intolerable perplexity. "I wish," I cried, "that I could do anything to rid you of this disgusting fellow. I am certain he is at the bottom of it. I wish I could rid you of him."

She did not answer at first, but after a time she became more composed, and asked, "How?"

"Give him up to the police," I said impatiently; but the words were hardly out of my mouth when I felt that however practical this course might be it was hardly in keeping with the heroic key in which I had felt and spoken a moment before.

"But I don't want to give him up to the police," she murmured, and again her tears fell fast and she bewailed her lot.

I was a little staggered at this. "Why not?" I asked.

"I could not do it without compromising my-



self," she said. She began to smile through her tears, and, with another sudden change of mood, arose and wiped her eyes, turning her back on me the meanwhile. "You see," she said, "I am not at all the tragic heroine you supposed. I am but a poor, weak woman, with all a weak woman's little fears and scruples."

"But what is there to prevent me from telling the police where the man is? He must be somewhere in the neighborhood, unless"—It occurred to me that possibly he might have obtained the means of escape from her and be now at a distance, but I hesitated to say this to her.

"I know where he is," she said presently; "but what you suggest can't be done." She shook her head decisively. "I may as well tell you," she said at last, with a smile, "I was weak enough last night to give him an old suit of my husband's which happened to have been sent down here, and if he is taken he must be taken in that. I did not think of that at first; in fact, I thought of it only just before I sent for you."

I suddenly remembered that she had said when I came in, that she wanted me to do her a service. What could it be? I reminded her of the fact, and put the question to her."

"It is a very singular request that I am to make," she answered, "as you will probably think when you hear it." She hesitated for a moment, and then continued, with just a shade of embar-



rassment in her voice. "I promised to take him some money to-day in the old churchyard. But I find that I cannot go there. That is to say, I am afraid to go. I don't know what advantage he might take of my being alone."

There was a significant pause. The unspoken request was pretty plainly indicated. I confess I was a little startled at the idea of becoming a purse-bearer to a convict, who had struck me as being a specially brutal and unscrupulous ruffian. Much as I admired Mrs. Ingers, such a mission fell upon my ardor with a sudden chill. It was obviously her wish that I should take the money to him, but to gain time for reflection I pretended to think that what she wanted was an escort. It was rather a mean pretence on my part, and I was ashamed of it even at the moment; but I was so taken aback at being asked to assist directly in the escape of a felon, who seemed to me to deserve the severest punishment, that I took this weak course.

"It would certainly not be safe for you to go alone," I said.

"And you are prepared to go with me?"

"Yes," I said, "though really I am most loath to help in saving such a scoundrel from his deserts."

"Thanks," she said, taking my hand, "you are a true friend. I know, of course, it is not a pleasant service, but I value it all the more. But it



would hardly do for us to be seen walking together out there again. It would set people talking. And I am sure, since you are willing to go with me, you will not object to go by yourself."

The traces of her recent passion of weeping were still about her eyes: I could not refuse her.

I was in for it. I made a virtue of necessity, and agreed with as good a grace as I could.

"But how am I to find him?" I asked. "He is certain to be in hiding."

For this also she was prepared. She gave me a whistle which I was to sound three times when I reached the churchyard, and he would appear.

Now that I had agreed to go, she was eager that I should set out at once.

"You must urge him to fly at once," were her parting instructions. "Assure him that he has not a moment to lose. They are certain to search for him all along the coast."



## CHAPTER X.

“LOOK THERE! WHAT IS THAT?”

I HAD an uncomfortable feeling at the time that Mrs. Ingers had not been quite straightforward with me; that she was keeping something back. She was particularly flurried when she spoke of the police being certain to search the links. This recurred to me distinctly afterwards when I learned that a note from her had come to the police-station that very morning to say that the fugitive convict had been seen lurking about the churchyard on the links. I state the fact, and leave my readers to make their own conjectures. When I talked the matter over with Doctor X. afterwards, he asked me whether I did not see that she sent me with money to the convict because she wanted me out of the way to leave the coast clear for Mr. Wood. But that was absurd. I was not so infatuated with her that I would have been likely to dangle about Garacraig House and the links on the chance of seeing her. On the other hand, I don't think it could merely have been that she sent the message before remembering that the convict would be caught in her husband's clothes, and that this would compromise



her; it would have been so easy for her to say that he had stolen the bag from Garacraig House. No; I am inclined to think that it was merely another example of her impulsive and changeful nature: that she sent the information to the police, and immediately after repented and relented.

Certainly, however, if I had known this, I should have been much more reluctant to undertake her errand; and as it was, I did not at first like the job or the way in which she had almost manœuvred me into it. There was something wholly unexpected, mysterious, disconcerting about her request that I should help her in keeping this felon out of the clutches of the law. It was a note out of tune—a discord. But when I thought of her passionate self-abasement, of her longing for a happier life, of her complaint of suffering and proud rejection of pity, of her splendid beauty when she drew herself up, ready to stand alone, self-reliant, I felt certain that her motives must at least be generous. It must simply be that I did not know enough to understand her, and that she was too agitated to think of explanations which I could not in the circumstances ask for. I was not a little proud, too, of having inspired her with such confidence that she should ask such a service of me upon such slight acquaintance. And the man—the convict—it might be, since she who had suffered from him was anxious to shield him from punishment, was not so bad as he looked.



Appearances were decidedly against him; but it might be that he had slipped into crime thoughtlessly, in some moment of temporary madness—that he was a victim of circumstances. Perhaps in his younger days he had loved her, and her marriage had driven him to despair, and despair had led to crime. This would explain much that I had overheard; would explain, too, her lingering compassion for him, and her desire for his escape.

Yes; this harmonized everything. It was all to her credit. She was a true and noble-hearted woman, faithful to her early affections. Her marriage with Ingers had doubtless been a marriage of convenience, and this convict who had now sunk so low still had a hold upon her in the woman's tender memories of her first love.

Reconciled thus in a measure to the object of my repulsive errand, I began to take a more cheerful view of it, and even to feel a certain exultation, as became a clerk in the Education Office, at the prospect of widening my experience by an interview with an interesting convict—a victim of circumstances. Forgetting for a moment Mrs. Ingers's imperative injunction that I should urge him to fly at once as soon as the money was in his hand, I pleased myself with planning how I should extract from him something about his past life, and the various steps in his downward career.

I had reached the links, and was busy with such



thoughts, when of a sudden my heart was brought into my mouth by the sight of a figure advancing from the sea over the sandhills on my left. He was a large, shapely man in a suit of checked tweed, with knickerbockers and a deerstalker cap,

Mrs. Ingers had given the convict a suit of her husband's. This must be he. He had grown tired of waiting, and had strolled out among the sand-dunes to meet her. "What cool courage the man has," thought I to myself, and rather admired the ruffian for it.

I shaped my course so as to meet him, and had to alter it slightly once or twice for that purpose. I tried to look as unconcerned as possible, and looked about to right and left as if I had no object but to take the air or admire the scenery; but there must have been something marked in my behavior, for as we drew near I observed that he was staring at me intently. This, however, did not disabuse me of the idea that he was the convict; on the contrary, it rather confirmed me in that idea.

"Good morning, sir," I said, stopping and raising my hat when he was within a few paces.

"Good morning," he answered rather gruffly, in a voice that plainly said, "Who the devil are you?" It might have been the *hauteur* of an English gentleman, or the surliness of a convict; I judged it to be the latter.



"May I ask," I said politely, "if you expect to see Mrs. Ingers to-day?"

He started, frowned, and pulled vigorously at a heavy moustache before answering. "May I ask," he returned at length, "what business that is of yours?"

Before the words came I had time for certain rapid observations. The hand that he had raised to his moustache carried a signet ring. The moustache was obviously not artificial. I looked at his tie and at his breast. His tie was fastened with a ring bearing a large cameo, and he wore a heavy gold chain.

I was annoyed at not having seen some of these significant things, particularly the moustache, before I stopped him. I am afraid I must have been rather nervous, for I am a fairly good observer as a rule.

"I beg your pardon, sir," I stammered. "I took you for somebody else. Good morning."

I walked off with as much dignity as I could. When I had gone some thirty or forty yards I ventured to look round, and caught him in the act of looking round at me. I did not turn again till I reached the churchyard, and by that time he was about a mile off, and apparently heading for Garacraig House. The sea was visible from the wall on which I stood. A short distance out lay the yacht which had been there the night before.



At once it flashed across me who this new stranger was: it was Mr. Wood.

"It was lucky indeed that Mrs. Ingers did not come," I thought to myself, as I proceeded to summon the convict from his lurking place.

Three times I sounded the whistle, and then I waited. I expected to see him rise like a ghost from one of the tombs, and kept a sharp look-out all around me. I began to fear that something had gone wrong, that he had already fled, or was concealed too far off to hear the signal, or saw me and was suspicious of showing himself. I write deliberately "to fear," for really by this time I was so much in the spirit of the thing that I should have been disappointed if he had not made his appearance.

I was raising the whistle to my lips to repeat the signal and had extended my eyes beyond the tombs, when above a grassy hill to the south of the churchyard, at the spot where he had disappeared on the previous evening, I saw a close-cropped head cautiously elevated. The moment it caught my eyes it disappeared again.

"All right," I hallooed. "Mrs. Ingers. All right. Mrs. Ingers."

After a few seconds, during which I heard a click, the head reappeared, and with a hand resting on the grass and the barrel of a pistol levelled straight at me.



"All right," said a gruff voice. "I can hear you. You needn't halloo so loud."

"There is no necessity for you to hold out that pistol," I responded, in a tone hardly more civil than his own, for I was not over-pleased with this ungracious reception. If he was the victim of circumstances, there must have been a bad grain in the fellow to give circumstances a chance. "That is hardly the way to receive a friend," I added, as he showed no sign of changing his attitude. "I have brought you some money from Mrs. Ingers. Come here and get it." I took a little bag from my pocket and held it out as I spoke.

"How much is there?" he demanded, with no abatement of the gruffness of his voice.

"I had not the curiosity to ask. I simply bring it at Mrs. Inger's desire. I brought it to oblige her, and if you don't come and get it at once I will take it back."

"I'm blest if you do, my pippin," returned he. "You just bring it up here, or I'll put a bullet through your nut in the twinkling of a bedpost. The cash is not yours by your own showing. Look here, guv'nor," he continued, in a milder tone, "I don't want to be uncivil, you know, but situated as I am I can't afford to be too gushing. How am I to know who you've got concealed among those blooming tombs? You may as well bring it up here since you have brought it so far."



There was some force in this. It is true one may go a mile for love where one would not go a yard under compulsion. But the point was not worth arguing, certainly not worth being shot for. I dropped over the wall, and walking up the knoll, tossed the bag to him.

"Thank ye, matie," he said; "thank ye kindly."

"I have a message for you also from Mrs. Ingers," I said. "It is that you had better make all haste from here, because the police are on your track."

"Thank ye again. I like saying 'thank ye.' You haven't anything about yourself that you would like to give to a pal in distress? That ticker now would be useful, and I'd send it back to you from America when I'd done with it."

The fellow's impudence was too much for my temper. "Look here, you scoundrel," I said, "if you want my watch you must take it." And I really felt as if I could part with my life rather than give into him again, his manner was so insolent.

He looked me up and down with a quizzical grin. "You're a gamer one than you look. You've got a bit of pluck in you, though one wouldn't think it to look at you. Do you happen to know if I settled the hash of that warder at the jail?"

"I believe he is still alive," I said.



"In that case, mate, you may keep your ticker, if you've game to fight for it. Keep it as a souvenir, as a consideration for bringing me the ready rhino, though I dare say it's hanging with me all the same if I'm nabbed. If I had stiffened the warder I might as well have laid you out: they hang for one, and they can't do more for two. And now you may as well tell me who you are. I like to know my friends. And why did Lorry send you instead of coming herself?"

He still lay face downward, extended at full length on the grassy slope, just as he had posted himself so as to have the best chance of seeing the churchyard without being seen. All trace of the convict had disappeared from his dress; he was attired in the tweeds of a country gentleman. He had provided himself even with a collar and shoes from Mr. Ingers's wardrobe, and by his side lay a deer-stalker cap of the same stuff as the rest of the suit.

I don't know whether it was relief at finding that I might keep both life and honor, or simply that the fellow's impudent humor was irresistible, but I felt inclined now to enter into conversation with him, and get a little deeper, if I could, into his criticism of life.

"Mrs. Ingers," I said, "sent me because I chanced to be at hand. But why does she take such an interest in you?"



He winked. "Are you one of her spoons? Jealous, eh?"

His manner was most revolting. "Mrs. Ingers," I said, "is a lady for whom I have the highest respect."

"So say all of us," he retorted.

"You were once a gentleman, I understand," I said.

He nodded, and plucking a stalk of tall grass put the end in his mouth, and tried to tickle his forehead with the beard of it, kicking his toes on the ground at the same time like an idle boy.

"Has prison life driven all proper feeling out of you?"

"Mostly," he answered, and continued his occupation.

There was no use in getting angry with such a shameless villain. Curiosity mastered my disgust.

"There was something between you and Mrs. Ingers at one time, was there not?"

"We are cousins."

"And you were in love with her, when that word," I could not help adding, "had a more sacred meaning for you."

"Stow that, mate," he shouted angrily, handling his revolver. "No cheek. I spooned her before she married Old Moneybags."

"And what about the cheque?"

"What do you know about the cheque? He dropped the grass from his mouth, and looked at



me hard, but without meeting my eye. "You must be very confidential with Lorry before she told you about that."

"She did not tell me. I overheard what you said at her window last night."

He swore horribly.

"Why do you use such foul language?"

"None of that!" he roared in reply, starting to his feet. "I won't have you coming your cant over me. If you had been as long in jail as I have you would like a little variety in your lingo as much as I do. It's d—d monotonous, and you must have freedom in something. They can't tie up your tongue, blast them! They would if they could. But look here, guv'nor, you were in the room with Lorry last night when she cut up so deuced rough on me. I couldn't understand why she was so skittish."

"You make a mistake. I was not in the room."

"Where were you, then? Under the sof'y?"

"No, I was outside on the lawn behind you."

"Ah! I see," he laughed with a horrible, hoarse bray, apparently much relieved, "hanging about her window. So you're not in it any more than me. Well, I'll tell you about the cheque," he continued, stretching himself on the grass again. "That was a rum go. You must know that I was dreadfully gone on Lorry before she married old Ingers, and after too. I used to hang about her window just like you."



The recollection seemed to soften his voice and improve his language, which I was glad of. I did not consider it worth while to correct his mistake about my relations with Mrs. Ingers, but I interrupted him to ask why she married Mr. Ingers.

“You have never seen Ingers, or you wouldn’t ask. Money, of course. He’s a good quarter of a century older than her. Do you know how I got nabbed the second time? I was walking in one of their squares in Edinburgh about a month after I got out, without the smallest thought, so help me, of harming a fly or priggish a potato, when who should I see strutting along, as if the place belonged to him, but this Ingers. I could not resist it—he looked so d—d consequential. So I gave him a hug, and was collared on the spot. I’ve always had such beastly luck. Yes, collared on the spot by a common bobby. I did not even get a run for it. Would you believe it? I never did anything in my life but doctor those two cheques and garotte this beastly old Ingers, and I’ve now served seven years. I call it beastly hard lines, when there are scores of fellows who have done twenty times as much and never picked a pound of oakum. Oh, I’m sick of it.”

“No doubt it’s hard,” I assented; “but from what I overheard I understood that you tried to throw the blame of forging those cheques on Mrs. Ingers, and made infamous insinuations



against her besides. You can't call that so much bad luck as—"

He interrupted me. "Yes, I do; d—d bad luck. It was my lawyer's idea to get me off, and it got me two years more at least."

"You don't mean to say that any respectable solicitor invented such a line of defence as that?"

"Well, he put it into my head by his questions. A fellow must do something when he's cornered. I thought it would make old Ingers drop the prosecution. He ought never to have begun it, the canting old hypocrite, building a church, and putting the screw on his wife's cousin. D—n him! If he were up there now, I'd garotte him again if I swung for it."

I was sorry to see that prison discipline had not softened the ferocity of this interesting victim of circumstances. I asked myself whether there was something wrong with a system that turned out such a discontented, self-commiserating, and murderous ruffian after seven years' experience of it. Was it not founded on a mistaken principle? Should not its aim be reformation rather than punishment? But could such a character be reformed otherwise than by literally making him over again?

I looked down at the man as he lay there on the grass, tossing the little bag I had brought him from hand to hand, and chuckling with fierce joy over the thought of once again garotting old



Ingers. There was no mark of Cain upon him now that the tweeds of this same old Ingers, which sat loosely on his big but lean and hard figure, had been substituted for the prison dress. The deer-stalker cap concealed the jail-bird hair of the head, and he wore a somewhat rough-looking beard and moustache. Was the composition of the inner man beyond human power to change?

I roused myself from such thoughts. I felt that it would be worse than useless to give utterance to them. There was nothing to be gained by an interchange of ideas with Roper on the subject.

"Where did you get those whiskers?" I asked him abruptly.

The chinking of the gold and the thinking of vengeance on Ingers seemed to have put him in high spirits. He looked up with a laugh, much less raucous than any sound I had yet heard from his jail-bird throat.

"A little rough," he said, "but well enough at a distance or in the dark. They're home-made articles. Look here." He pulled off the whole covering. "Neatly-mounted goat's hair on wire. This style, three bob and a tanner."

"But where did you find the goat?" I asked, thinking that he had made them for himself.

"I didn't find the goat, you fool," he retorted. "I got them from a poacher fellow whom I met here last night. I must say you are a very obliging population here. You have quite set me up



in business." And he tossed his bag of sovereigns in the air.

I am not a very thin-skinned person. At least, I don't think so, and I try not to be. But I confess I have an objection to talking with a man who calls one a fool upon such very slight provocation as I had given to this cross-grained felon. It is not the insult to one's self that one minds, but the rudeness of the thing, the jolt off the rails, as it were, that it gives to a smooth-running conversation.

I prepared to leave my interesting companion, and by way of doing so reminded him of Mrs. Ingers's injunction to him to depart speedily.

"Ah," he returned, "so Lorry wants me to hook it, does she? Not yet awhile. I'm quite happy and comfortable where I am. I have not been so well for years."

"But," said I, with difficulty refraining from returning him his own uncomplimentary epithet, "the police are certain to search every yard of the coast."

"Let them search," returned he confidently. "That poacher fellow has put me up to the lie of the country. They might as well search for a mouse. I shall lie low and laugh at them. That poacher fellow is the right sort. I've got a lovely hole not a mile from here. I say, now, couldn't you bring me a bottle or two of wine? I've got some scran in the larder, but you might bring us



something to moisten it. I should like to taste fiz again." And he smacked his lips.

"If you stay, you stay at your own risk," I said. "Good morning."

"Well, it's not much to ask," he muttered somewhat sulkily. "I'd think nothing of doing as much for you. You needn't be so uppish. You may get into a fix yourself some day."

I was climbing the churchyard wall when I heard this. I could not help laughing. "All right," I returned; "when I'm in a fix"—

"I say," he interrupted, "you don't seem half a bad sort after all. Would you like to have a lark to-night? If you'd bring a drop of liquor I'd give you such a lark as you never had in your life before."

This rather appealed to me. "What is it?" I asked.

"Only a little game between me and the poacher. You see that grave near where you're standing? There was a cove buried there yesterday—a quarrier who had tumbled off the rocks and got his knowledge-box smashed. We are thinking of unearthing him and making a late convict of him. Will you come and see the fun?"

I shuddered at this gruesome invitation, and looked at him to see whether he was in jest or in earnest. It was obvious that he might have a serious purpose, to dress up the quarrier's corpse in his prison dress and lay it somewhere among



the rocks in the hope that it might be taken for his own. I was still wondering at the recklessness that could confide such an intention to me, wondering what I had done to invite such confidence and wondering whether or not he was chaffing me, when, as I looked at him, I observed his expression change.

"Look there," he shouted, pointing with his arm beyond me, "what's that?"

I looked and saw a curious procession moving rapidly towards the churchyard. It looked like a line of beaters, twenty or thirty in number, stretching across the whole breadth of the links, from the billowy sand-dunes by the shore across the grassy flats to the verge of the ploughland. The figures at the seaward end of the line appeared and disappeared among the hillocks as they advanced, but they advanced with energy. Conspicuous among them by belted tunic and helmet were three policemen, one at each end of the line and one in the middle. Even at the distance it could be seen that some of the party carried guns.

There was no room for mistaking the significance of this apparition. It was a search-party. Roper saw what it meant as soon as myself.

"Ta ta," he called to me, at the same time making a gesture of contempt at the approaching band. "Thanks to my friend the poacher, you may look till you're blind, blast you!"

"Have a care," I shouted to him as he turned



in a leisurely manner to go,—siding with him, the hunted, I don't know why, perhaps as an involuntary sequel to our last half-hour's comradeship,—“have a care. Your friend the poacher is walking with that mid-most policeman. I could tell his gait a mile off, not to mention his otter-skin cap.”

I shall never forget the tempest of savage oaths that he showered against the supposed traitor in his impotent rage.



## CHAPTER XI.

## PURSUER AND PURSUED.

MY consternation was almost equal to his own. I had entered into this business, step after step, with misgiving. Possibly my sense of guilt was out of all proportion to the magnitude of my offence, for after all I had only brought some money to a fugitive convict at the urgent entreaty of a woman in distress. Looking back now I really cannot see how I could have avoided doing it, nor do I feel that I would do otherwise now in the same circumstances. Still, aiding and abetting the escape of a convict could hardly be defended to the common judgment as fitting work for the holiday of a public servant. I had an uneasy feeling that I might have a difficulty at justifying my position; and when confronted with the near prospect of being found out, this uneasy feeling grew to a keen and most disturbing sense of guilt. As I looked at the rapidly approaching line of the search-party, I felt for the moment that I was the object of their search as much as my compromising acquaintance, and I was seized with sudden panic.



My first impulse was a distracted yearning to save myself, to run and hide anywhere.

"Where is that hole you spoke of?" I shouted to the convict. "Quick! Let us get into it." And I put one foot on the churchyard wall ready to leap over as soon as I got his answer.

He continued to swear horribly, only bringing the hole and myself within the sweep of his imprecations.

I wrung my hands in distraction; for a moment I felt inclined to echo his strong language against my own stupidity in getting into such a mess. I turned upon him.

"Why did you not go off at once as I told you to when I brought you the money? You see what you have done now."

The gist of his reply, given in language that I will not transcribe, was that I was to blame for this, that I had kept him there with my jabbering.

This angered me, and wrath lifted me out my ignominious state of panic.

"At all events," I cried, "you can shift for yourself now, you ungrateful scoundrel! I cast you off. I never brought you a penny. I never saw you in my life before. I am simply taking a walk on the links and a look at the tombstones."

And suiting my action to this conception of the proper line for me to take in self-preservation, I began sauntering with desperately assumed composure through the churchyard towards the ap-



proaching search-party, now within a quarter of a mile of us.

I had not reached the opposite wall when I heard him clambering after me. I started and turned, but I was now strung up to such a pitch that I remained perfectly collected. I waited for him to come up. I observed that he had pulled off his black whiskers and now exhibited a clean-shaven face. I was cool enough to reflect that he must have secured Ingers's razors as well as his clothes at Garacraig.

"What's up now?" I asked coldly.

"All right, my pippin," he said; "let's brazen it out together." And he made a movement to take my arm.

"What do you mean?" I demanded, shaking off his hand. "I have nothing to do with you."

"Oh yes, you have," he retorted, in a sneering tone and with a threatening look in his eyes. "I mean to stick to you. And if you try on any games I have a barker in my pocket which bites as well as barks." And he tapped his pocket significantly.

I stood up and looked at him firmly, with a heedful attention to his right hand. I was really so mad and reckless at the moment that I would have risked being shot rather than give in to him.

"Look you here," he pursued, "I have had my swear out, and can look things square in the face. It's no good my going back to that hole. If the



poacher means to give me up, I should only be making it easy for him, But it's just on the cards that it is not his game, and he's joined the peelers only to put them off the scent, for that's where he keeps his poaching tools and smuggled 'baccy and stuff, and he would let himself in if he showed it. So I'll just walk alongside of you till we meet them. If he hasn't blown on me he'll take no notice, even he knows me, and perhaps he won't in this toggerie without the headmark of his goatee beard. If I see any sign that he has blown, then—"

He rapped out another of his astounding oaths, and added that he was probably a gone coon in any case; and that if he must swing, he might as well get full value for his money.

I said nothing in reply, but he probably detected some sign of hesitation in my face, for he continued his argument impetuously.

"Look you here, guv'nor, you seem a good-natured sort enough, and it can make no odds to you. You're taking a walk, and I'm simply a friend, or—well—if you prefer it, a stranger that you've picked up in your walk. I look respectable enough, don't I, in these togs, quite the country squire, eh? Why shouldn't I be Ingers himself? If we walk quietly along and meet them as if we had nothing to fear, these boobies will touch their hats to us, that is to say, to our clothes, as if we were two blooming gentlemen



enjoying the beauties of nature, and the sea-breeze, and the jolly little rabbits. Come now," he continued, "it can make no odds to you. I wouldn't harm you for the world, for this I will say, that you've done the handsome by me up till now."

The search-party came steadily on; I could hear them shouting excitedly to one another with jest and laughter from end to end of the line. It was a day to mock my desperate quandary—a fine rich-tinted August day, the light broken and softened by clouds driven briskly across the sky; the ruffled sea was of an intense blue. One moment I took the scene in with superhuman clearness; the next moment I made a desperate effort to collect myself and come to a sharp decision. There was little time to lose.

"Whether I stay here, or run away, or go to meet them," I said, uttering my thoughts aloud, "I can't prevent your accompanying me."

"Right you are, old man," he said, with his jarring familiarity, "and so you had better let us stick together sociable like. You were talking to me quite friendly a few minutes ago; we had better keep it up. I have done nothing new since then to make you sheer off. So we had much better keep it up. It will be safer for both of us."

My pride was touched at his reference to my safety and the linking of it with his. But it was not to be gainsaid; I had committed myself by



bringing him the money. If he was caught in my company I could only get out of it by hard lying, and this I did not feel equal to.

"You are right, I dare say," I said, at length.

"Not a doubt of it," he answered; "and you'll say so twice over when you see how I can play the heavy swell."

They were not two hundred yards off when we dropped over the wall and made our way at ostentatious leisure towards them.

I must do my companion's courage the justice to say that he was much more at his ease than myself. His acting of the heavy swell was considerably overdone, but probably none the less effective on that account with the spectators. His points were sufficiently accentuated to tell, and the caricature was so comic at times that it helped me to keep down my nervous uneasiness, and half reconciled me to the impudent scoundrel. He strutted along with his jacket thrown back and his thumbs in his arm-holes; his cap cocked on one side and pulled down well over his eyes. At every few paces he stopped and looked inquiringly at the line of searchers; with his mouth well pursed out, he faced from one end of the line to the other, and repeated, "God bless me!" and "What is it all about?" I had no choice but to play second fiddle to this elaborate exhibition of dignified curiosity.

Our course lay naturally towards the middle of



the line, where Sandy Leiper was advancing side by side with the parish constable.

Sandy, of course, knew me; but I observed that he eyed my companion very closely. The others gave little attention to us; they stared at us a good deal, but it was the stare of vacuous curiosity in a district where well-dressed strangers are rare. They withdrew their eyes modestly when I looked particularly at any of them. They trudged on somewhat hilariously, like men with an exciting object in view; our presence seemed to stimulate them in the ardor of their chase.

But Sandy's glance was scrutinizing and suspicious, and watched him with some alarm, for his own sake chiefly, for I saw that my companion had marked his shrewd scrutiny, although the only effect on him was to make him still more exaggerated in his *rôle* of astonished stranger.

The last twenty yards between us were diminished one by one. The suspense was most intense. Every instant I expected to hear the report of a revolver aimed at the suspected traitor, and to see the convict running for his life over the bents.

But yard by yard the interval was traversed, and nothing happened.

I stopped Sandy to ask him, what we so well knew, the meaning of the array. He stood up with his hands in his pockets, swinging his body round from side to side, to watch the search.



party as he spoke. They were hurrying on with unbroken pace. Perceiving this, Sandy indulged in a wink.

"You didn't happen to see the man in any odd corner?" asked Sandy, with a world of sly meaning in look and tone.

Sandy was true after all. That danger was past. I breathed more freely, so freely indeed that I felt an insane desire to caper and toss my cap in the air.

But what was to be done next? I put the question to my uninvited companion. He, with his head on one side, his thumbs in his arm-holes, and the calves of his legs as far back as the muscles permitted, continued to observe the search, wheeling right and left with a vigorous assumption of brisk curiosity.

"We must lie by them for a time," he said; "it would look odd to go on without waiting to see whether they nab the fellow. Look over the churchyard well, my lads!" he shouted.

His advice was taken, and we waited at a little distance, while a ring was formed round the churchyard, and some adventurous spirits climbed the wall and made a thorough examination of the tombstones. "Beastly fools!" said Roper to me. "Do they think I have put myself into a coffin and buried myself? Get spades, you fools, and dig me out."

After this they spread themselves out again



into a line and moved away southward beating the links as before.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked, trying to convey by my tone that our paths henceforward were separate.

"Well," he replied deliberately, "I feel rather peckish. I think I shall toddle up to Lorry's and ask her to give me some lunch. Unless," he added, "you insist upon carrying me off to lunch with you. But—er—weally," he continued, striking an attitude, and speaking as a heavy swell, "weally, now I wemembah, I—er—have not the honah of knowing—er—where you—er—live, 'pon my honah."

The ghastly buffoon! Was I never to get rid of him? The success of his last manœuvre seemed to have intoxicated him.

"This puts an entirely new complexion upon the aspect of affairs," he said, mouthing his words in a pompous manner. "If I can pass muster like this, demmy, I don't see why I should not have a high old time, and travel to foreign climes like a blooming aristocrat. Look here, old man, I have an idea. I will come and lunch with you, and you shall drive me to the station. I'm afraid I must leave my traps in the poacher's smuggling ken, but I have no doubt you can lend me a port-manteau and a shirt or two. You can have mine in exchange."

It was most revolting, maddening in fact. I



hastened to assure him firmly that I was but a guest in my uncle's house and that I could not take him there.

"All right, old man," he returned, with easy equanimity. "Don't apologize. I quite understand your difficulty. In that case, I will stroll up to Garacraig House, and get a bite there. Do you go in my direction so far?"

How my heart leaped up at this hint of separation! I eagerly seized the opening. My most direct road did lie with him so far, but I pointed vaguely to some fields on the right, and said I must take a short cut through them. I pointed out his nearest way to him, and was so overjoyed that I almost shook hands with him. But I remembered myself in time, and instead expressed a severe hope that if he escaped it would be a lesson to him. I put it bluntly enough, I dare say, for I was in terror lest he should change his mind, and fix himself on to me again, and I was off the road, through a paling, and on to a turnip-field almost before I had finished my few words of parting.

"*Au revoir*," he called after me in a mocking tone.

I did not mind his mockery. Never in my life have I experienced such a sense of relief. I strode rapidly and recklessly through the turnips at right angles to the road, never looking behind me. I did not venture to look round till I reached



the other side of the turnip-field, when I saw him strutting along towards Garacraig at his leisure. He waved his hand to me, but I did not return the salutation. The next field was covered with waving green corn. I thought of the irascible agriculturist, and his fury against trespassers ; but I was reckless. I plunged in and waded through with all my might as if the enemy were behind me and every step increased the distance between us.

It was three o'clock by the time I reached the Manse, and their luncheon hour was half-past one. My first duty was to find my aunt, who was a somewhat ceremonious person and apologize. She sometimes sat, or rather lay, in the drawing-room on the first floor ; sometimes in my uncle's study on the ground floor. I tried the study first. It was a warm day and my rapid walk had made me very hot, and I paused a moment at the door to wipe my forehead before entering. When I did open the door, I saw—not my aunt, but a scene which made me stand and stare, and the next moment burst into a fit of uncontrollable but somewhat bitter laughter.

My cousin Mary was seated in an arm-chair, usually occupied by my uncle, opposite the desk at which he composed his sermons. She held some knitting in her hand, and seemed to be so closely occupied with it that she had a difficulty in raising her eyes to mine. Her color was con-



siderably heightened. She really looked very pretty.

On the sofa on which my aunt usually reclined while her husband pursued his labor of the desk sat a young man, a handsome, blonde-haired fellow, with great breadth of shoulder and depth of chest—Alec Errol, our local doctor. Like Mary, he was intently occupied, and was gazing so earnestly at an illustrated copy of Tennyson's "Princess," that he did not look up at first when I opened the door. The book being held high I saw the lettering on the back, and saw that he was holding it upside down.

Then I caught his eye, and exploded. They made a feeble effort at feigning surprise, then joined in my laughter; first Mary, then he.

I laughed, but it was possibly with some degree of excitement and bitterness. Not that I was in love with my cousin Mary. I had made love to her, it is true, as I have said before, but only in a half-serious way, and my passion for her could not have been very deep, for no sighs and groans had rent my breast when she laughed, as was her custom, at my protestations of devotion. Still, I may have felt a little bitter at finding her alone with Dr. Errol under circumstances that pointed to a recognized engagement.

"The health of the parish of Garvalt must be excellent," I said, perhaps with something forced in my voice, "when its only doctor can spend his



afternoons in looking at illustrated books upside down."

"Dear me!" said Mary readily. "What a goose you are, Alec."

Alec! She called him by his Christian name. It was a little bitter. I remember it did give me a certain pang.

"Dr. Errol," Mary continued, with unblushing effrontery, "was giving me some instructions about Mamma. She has not been at all well for some time. We have been very anxious about her."

I thought to myself that in this case it was rather selfish on the part of the doctor to seek to deprive Mrs. Brown of her nurse, but Mary did not give me time to make any remark on her mother's illness.

"But what is the matter with you, George?" she ran on. "You look very hot and excited. Have you been talking about spooks with Mrs. Ingers all this time? It must be a very agitating subject. You look as if they had been chasing you."

I escaped from them to the dining-room.

Not without bitterness did I recall, at my solitary meal, what I had said and thought within the last few days about Mary's straightforward simplicity, and frank, fresh, open, unsophisticated disposition. She could deceive, too, it seemed. She could play a part, innocent country maiden as she



was, and concoct her little deceptions as readily and speak them as trippingly on the tongue as the most practiced woman of the world.

For the moment I was as bitter against my cousin as if she had really given me cause. And somehow I began to think more sympathetically than I had done for the last few hours of the troubles of Mrs. Ingers. In the first flush of my joy at shaking off the convict I had been disposed to thank my stars that I was rid of the whole business. But now I began to reproach myself for allowing him to go on to Garacraig alone. How was Mrs. Ingers to defend herself against him? I shuddered to think of the danger in which she stood, with nobody to help her against the demands of this strong and unscrupulous ruffian. The more I thought of it, the more uneasy I became. I felt that I must go at once to Garacraig and see what had happened.



## CHAPTER XII.

## WAS SHE GOOD OR BAD?

My anxiety about Mrs. Ingers, now fully awakened, was so keen and disturbing that, once I had started to walk to Garacraig, I ceased to think of any definite form of danger. I simply hurried on, mentally reaching forward, striving to annihilate space and time, and arrive on the instant at a knowledge of the worst. What the worst might be I took no time to think; my whole energy absorbed in getting near it with as little delay as possible. From what I had seen of Roper's fits of ferocity, I felt that even her life might be in danger if she opposed his demands. I reproached myself that, in my selfish joy at having escaped from his company, I had not at once thought of the risk run by her.

I took the shortest way to Garacraig, through the fields and the plantation to the back of the house, almost running, frequently stumbling over the uneven ground, devoured by fear and remorse. I ran in earnest under the cover of the trees, and reached the house hot and breathless.

In order to reach the porch I had to pass the window of the parlor at which I had witnessed



the meeting between Mrs. Ingers and Roper. I turned my eyes towards it involuntarily as I passed, half expecting to see the lady again defending herself against his importunities.

It was a French window, opening on to the lawn. Mrs. Ingers was there, with her right hand on the handle of the latch. There was something stealthy in her attitude, as if she was trying to undo the fastening with as little noise as possible.

I was moving rapidly across the soft turf, and saw her for a second before she saw me. I was right in front of the window when she raised her eyes and encountered mine. She started violently and paled, her hand pulling the window open with a jerk, and then making an involuntary movement as if to shut it again.

A rapid glance showed me that she had a small travelling bag in her left hand, and a cloak thrown over her arm, and that she wore her hat. I stopped abruptly in my rapid walk and stared for a second, while my mind was busy with the significance of what I saw—the stealthy attitude, the start, the preparation for walking out, or—did she meditate a longer flight? That she had been driven from her own house by Roper; that she was trying somehow to evade him, struck me at once as obvious. I glanced behind her, and saw that he was not in the room.

She seemed to be deprived of speech for an instant as much as I was, but presently the blood



came back to her face, and she addressed me excitedly in a half-whisper as if gasping for breath and fearing to be overheard.

"Oh, Mr. Brown, how you startled me!" She sat down and held her hand against my side.

The gesture reminded me of what I knew about the weak state of her health some weeks before, and filled me with concern.

It did not occur to me then that she had any special reason for being startled at the sight of myself. I thought it was simply overstrung nerves; that my appearance had taken her by surprise, and that she was in that over-excited state in which any surprise produces a sort of panic. I did not then know that she had sent an intimation to the police before employing me as her messenger to the convict. When I did know this, I had reason to believe that as I burst upon her suddenly, with hot face and flustered manner, she may have misconstrued the object of my visit, and imagined that I came to reproach her. Innocent as I was of any such intention, my first words must have reassured her. They were apologetic, and endeavored to express something of the remorse that I felt at having left her to the tender mercies of Roper.

"I can never forgive myself, Mrs. Ingers," I said, entering the open window and standing before her. "I can never forgive myself for my stupidity in allowing that man to come on here



alone. It was worse than stupid ; it was mean and cowardly. I am ashamed of myself. I hope I am not too late to make some amends. He must have frightened you terribly. It pains me more than I can express to see you flying like this from your own house. Pray give me something to do, if there is anything that I can do for you."

She allowed me to speak like this for some little time without answering a word, meeting my eyes all the time with a strange expression of wonder and incredulity.

"Do, do?" she murmured, in a half-dazed way. "Something to do?"

"Yes," I answered, "if there is anything you can trust me to do after such a delinquency. Believe me, it was more thoughtlessness than anything else. I did not think of the danger to you."

She put her right hand to her head, leaned her elbow on the arm of the chair into which she had thrown herself, and seemed to ponder for a moment with half-averted face. Then she started up.

"No, no," she said. "Go away, and leave me. I have no right to take advantage of you. I would not have done it before if I had known how good you are."

"You have taken no advantage of me," I persisted.

She looked at me incredulously.



"I don't understand what you mean," I said.

"You are a good, brave little fellow," she said, rising and speaking in a decisive tone. "I am truly obliged to you for coming here with the idea of helping me out of my difficulties. But I would rather you had not come. You can do no good by remaining here. Let me beg of you now to go away. Take my best thanks for your good intentions."

She held out her hand. I took it reluctantly, doubtfully. If she had said no more, I should have had no choice but to withdraw, convinced though I was that she was in imminent peril, for there was something in her manner irresistibly suggestive of a genuine desire to be left to herself. But while I stood hesitating for a second, awkwardly irresolute between my anxiety to help her and doubt whether after all my presence might not be a hinderance rather than a help, paralyzed by this irresolution, and unable to extricate myself promptly, she added,

"I really cannot allow you to sacrifice yourself."

If she had stopped short of saying this, I should have taken it that it was on her own account that she wished me to go away, and this I now believe to have been the case. But by these last words she seemed to imply that regard for my safety was her motive. And fully alive as I was to the indelicacy of forcing my services upon her, considering the shortness of our acquaintance, I



could not retire upon that ground. If I had been a man of the world, I dare say I should have seen that her professed concern for me was only a polite pretence to soften the awkwardness of an unceremonious dismissal; but as it was, I did not see this, and felt that to go away thus would look as if I were afraid to stay and run any risk for myself.

"Really, Mrs. Ingers," I stammered, "I cannot leave you at the mercy of this man. Have you seen him? Perhaps you do not know that he is about here, somewhere near Garacraig. He told me he was coming here to get you to help him off."

"But," she said, with a smile, "I am not at his mercy. You see I am just about to fly out of his reach."

"At least," I pleaded, "let me see you to a place of safety. I am certain they would be only too glad to see you at the Manse, if you will go there with me."

This suggestion seemed greatly to increase her impatience. "No, no," she said almost angrily, still speaking in a low tone, as if fearful of being overheard; "I am quite able to take care of myself now. Don't you see that every moment you keep me here you increase the danger of his coming out before I am clear away?"

"He is here, then?"

"Yes, he is in the dining-room, and I am in



terror every moment lest he should come out and find me here."

"How stupid I am!" I answered, with a burst of officious zeal. "Let us go at once. Here, let me carry that bag for you."

Then, when she drew back with a look of alarm on her face, which somewhat staggered me, I continued to protest apologetically that I really could not let her go alone; that it was most thoughtless on my part to allow the man to make another descent upon Garacraig, but that I could not leave her now without such protection as it was in my power to offer, slight as that might be.

Even now I cannot recall this scene and my own blundering want of tact without a hot sense of shame. But how was I to know or to suspect that all the time I was obstinately pressing my services on Mrs. Ingers Mr. Wood was waiting for her in the glen, and that I was exasperating her impatience to the point of fury by preventing her from joining him? I never think of the situation without registering a vow never again to offer a service that I am not asked for. But I was young and inexperienced, eager to be of use, and unable to see in the circumstances, with such knowledge as I had of them, how I could possibly be in the way.

As I continued to insist upon accompanying her, she had thrown herself into a chair with a gesture of supreme vexation, and at last she spoke in



words that the most obstinate officiousness could not fail to understand.

"Mr. Brown," she said, "this is too much. You mean well, I have no doubt, but I really must insist upon your leaving me to manage my own concerns."

I was so stupefied by this frank outburst of temper that I could find nothing to say. I remember muttering something like "Certainly, if you put it in that way;" and after staring at her for a moment in utter confusion, making a bolt for the window. The pain that I suffered from her rebuff must have been very visible in my face, and possibly it was this that made her relent and call me back when I already had one foot outside the window-sill.

"You must not think me ungrateful," she said. "If you are really bent upon running into danger on my account there is one way in which you might help me."

The thrilling sweetness of her voice was irresistible. My resentment was at once disarmed. "Name it," I said. "I wish nothing more. If I have erred in being too officious, it has been purely in ignorance."

"I understand, I understand," she murmured. "Forgive my bad temper. If you knew how I have been worried you would make allowances for me."

"And, remember," I said, my desire to put my-



self right with her returning, "remember that if you had not sent for me first concerning this convict—"

"Yes, yes," she interrupted, with a slight return of impatience.

"What is it that I can do?" I asked, taking the hint of urgency.

"About this man, still," she said, with a deprecatory smile. "He is in there, in the dining-room. Would it be too much to ask you to—to—"

She seemed to have a difficulty in expressing her request. She broke off in the middle of it, and added with some little embarrassment, "I must escape alone."

"And you wish me to remain here, and keep a watch on him?"

"Not exactly that," she said, coming nearer to me, and speaking in almost caressing tones; "but if you would be so good—but it is really asking too much—if you would be so good as to go in there and hold him in conversation for a little. But it is asking too much."

"I will do it with pleasure," I said, with a confident smile, too much relieved at the prospect of escape from an awkward position to be able to think seriously of the consequences. I believe that at the moment I could have faced any danger to avoid the humiliation of simply walking away repulsed and leaving the lady to her own



devices. Anything better than turning tail in this ignominious way.

"I will do it with pleasure. But where are you to go in the mean time?"

"That is my secret," she said, with an arch smile. I never saw another woman with so many changes of expression. "You must not ask me that." If it had been the most trivial affair in the world, she could not have spoken in a lighter tone. But the next instant she knit her brows, and her voice became earnest and even sad. "Well, perhaps it is better after all . . . should tell you. What I am going to do is certain to be misconstrued, and it may be as well that I should take you into my confidence, that you may contradict any malicious rumors. Mr. Wood was here to-day."

"I met him on the links."

"So I gathered from what he said. Well, he was here when I saw this man hanging about the house, and he offered me a refuge on board his yacht. It is there that I am going. Do not offer again to accompany me. Mr. Wood is waiting for me in the glen, and I can easily get safely on board if you will kindly hold the man in check for less than half an hour."

It occurred to me to suggest that she would be equally safe at my uncle's, whence I could drive her to the station, if she wished to quit the neighborhood till it was clear of this pest. That



course would be equally safe, and it would not be open to misrepresentation as the other might be. But she did not give me time to make up my mind to offer this suggestion. She had hardly told me where she meant to take shelter when she hurriedly bade me good-bye, and snatching up her cloak and her bag, put her foot on the window-sill, leapt out, and ran with light, springy steps across the greensward, so shaping her course as to keep out of sight of the dining-room windows.

I watched her till she disappeared in the glen, and wondered then, as I have often wondered since, why she did not simply run to her own stables and get her servants to drive her to the station. I suppose it must have been that she seized upon the first way of escape that offered itself, and in her excited state was so preoccupied with this that she could not think of any other, even though it was much simpler and more obvious. It turned out to have been as well that she took me into her confidence, for I was able afterwards to remove her husband's suspicions.

In the mean time, however, I turned to fulfil my task of keeping the convict in play. One thing in her hurry and excitement she had forgotten to tell me, namely, that since Roper's descent upon Garacraig she had contrived to send for the police. I regretted this omission, because it would have made my task easier. If I had known that the police were at hand I should have contented



myself with simply watching to see that Roper did not follow upon her track, for I did not much relish the idea of facing him alone in the dining-room and trying to hold him in talk. However, knowing nothing of this arrangement of hers, I had no help for it but to carry out my promise literally, and beard the lion in his den. I confess that it was not without some trepidation that I turned the handle of the dining-room door.

Roper was seated at table with the remains of a chicken before him and a bottle of champagne at his right hand. He was tearing the flesh off a drumstick which he held to his mouth with both hands, and had every appearance of enjoying his meal. His flushed face and glistening eyes showed that the unaccustomed liquor was doing its work rapidly, and I saw that the bottle was already half-empty.

I had half expected to see him start when I entered ; but no ; he went on eating without showing the slightest surprise or confusion.

"All well at home, old man?" were his first words, uttered without taking the bone from his mouth. "You seemed in a deuce of a hurry to get there. Didn't find the chimney on fire or the baby in fits?"

Before I could think what to say in answer to this pleasantry, he put his bone down on the plate with a rattle that almost made me jump, and putting his right hand on the neck of the champagne



bottle, smacked his lips and asked in the lazy, indifferent tones of a man full-fed and at peace with the world,

“Well, what’s your little game now?”

I thought it best to humor him. “I have no game in particular, big or little,” I replied, as easily and pleasantly as I could, placing a chair for myself at the table, some little distance off; “I have simply come to keep you company. I was sorry to have to leave you so abruptly, but I had to hurry home to lunch.”

“Ah,” he said, “I like company at meals.” He looked amused, and picked his teeth contentedly with tongue and forefinger.

“Have a weed?” I suggested, producing a cigar-case.

“Thanks,” he drawled; “but I should like some cheese first. Would you mind ringing the bell?”

I did as he asked me, not so much astonished at his impudence, of which I had had abundant experience before, as puzzled by a certain air of purpose in his manner. There was no trace of inward uneasiness about him, no distrustful or inquiring looks, no bravado. To all appearance he was perfectly indifferent to my movements. It was as if I had dropped in upon a busy friend at his luncheon interval, a man who had done a good morning’s work, had a settled programme for the afternoon, and cared not a jot for anything



or anybody outside the limits of his business. Just such an appearance of settled intention was manifest in the whole bearing of Mr. Roper. What could it be? What was *his* little game?

I could of course take no step toward finding this out while the butler was in the room removing the remains of the chicken and putting the cheese on the table. During that functionary's presence the convict acted up to his conception of the heavy swell. The brand of champagne had not been fashionable before his incarceration, when he might have been better acquainted with that liquor; he did not know the name, asked me if I knew, and avowed his preference for "The Widow." However, he was good enough to admit that what he had was not bad stuff, and ordered the butler to bring a glass for me. Then he talked about shooting, and kept up quite a rattling fire of questions and comments till the butler left the room. The only very marked blunder he made was to say that he hoped to have a shot at a pheasant before he left, which, seeing that we were then in early August, implied a stay of some length. I observed the decorous butler steal a perplexed look at him when he said this. On the topic of shooting pigeons from traps, he evidently spoke from more familiar knowledge.

I did my best to encourage him in this discursive talk. He seemed really to enjoy showing off before the butler, who evidently did not know



what to make of him, though he carried through it all the impassive smoothness of a well-trained servant. It exactly suited my book, serving excellently to pass the time. I calculated that Mrs. Ingers must have had a good quarter-of-an-hour's start when, the cheese dispatched and the butler safely out of the room, I repeated my offer of a cigar.

"This is proper. This is something like," he said, as he settled himself in an easy chair after lighting up, having placed another chair within reach of his right leg. "This I call truly proper."

There was still about him the same indescribable but palpable air of rest before business. He had the look of a man settled down, but not for the day; of a man merely pausing for an interval of thorough enjoyment, with more work still in prospect, and confident anticipation of going through with it prosperously when the time came.

What were his plans? I thought I would try to draw him out. My mind was now comparatively at ease; he showed no trace of anxiety about Mrs. Ingers's absence, and even if he should start up and pursue now, it was only a mile and a half to the beach, and she was half-way there by this time.

"You have seen Mrs. Ingers, I suppose," I said.

"Lorry? Lord bless you, yes. Do you take this for a common pub? How was I to get this spread if she hadn't ordered it up for me?"



“And has she agreed to drive you to the station?” I asked.

He took a long pull at the cigar, emitted a great puff of smoke, and said coolly, as he watched it curling up to the ceiling, “You’ve hit it. Carriage at five.” He turned lazily round to look at the clock on the mantelpiece. “Wants ten minutes now.”

So that accounted for his business-like air. It was all arranged. Was it a justifiable act to let loose such a ruffian on society? I looked at him as he lay stretched at ease, peacefully watching the smoke of his cigar. Knowing him to be a jail-bird, I could trace evidences of this in his coarse complexion, his hard, tight-drawn, lean features, his rough hands—strangely out of keeping with the fashionable cut of Mr. Ingers’s tweed suit. To understand rightly the character of a face, you should see it in repose as well as in action; and Roper’s face, now in perfect tranquillity, bore unmistakable marks of hard and joyless labor—of hard labor done under compulsion. As I looked at his muscular figure, I could not help thinking with a shudder how little chance an ordinary man would have against him in a scuffle. No; Mrs. Ingers ought not to have helped him to escape. But what could a defenceless woman do?

I had plenty of leisure to make these reflections, for my companion showed no disposition to talk,



but puffed away with every sign of content ; and I was wondering whether after all I ought not to do something to secure his capture, when he startled me by clearing his throat and saying :

“ Do you happen to know anything about this fancy man of Lorry’s ? ”

“ I do not understand,” I said.

“ Him that has the yacht out there.”

“ No,” I said dryly.

He began to laugh as at a pleasant reminiscence. “ It was the rummest start,” he said. “ I gave them a turn down there in the glen. I came upon them spooning there, and got behind a tree. I can’t say I liked it, though,” he broke off savagely. “ Lorry always did fetch me. Have you known her long ? Artful, isn’t she, and fetching ? Oh, deuced fetching.”

My cheeks burned with indignation. “ Excuse me I said, “ I would rather not discuss Mrs. Ingers with you under her own roof.”

“ Quite right, young cock,” he laughed. “ You should have heard her discussing you with the jolly yachtsman. He saw you on the beach last night, and was jealous. Lorry always had an knack of making her spoons jealous. But she soon smoothed him down about you. An awkward sheep ! She couldn’t get rid of you. If you and I had not been there she would have got off with him last night.”

What was this the scoundrel suggested ? That



Mrs. Ingers had deliberately planned to elope with Wood, and was only prevented by my stumbling against her. The red flag—a signal? I refused to believe it.

“You have a lively imagination,” I said to him.

“Very,” he asserted; “and a good pair of ears. I had quite a little game with them down there. I showed myself at a little distance, and then stole back to hear what they would say. She made him believe that I was Ingers come unexpectedly, and left him waiting there while she ran up to weedle the old man and get a few things. I dare say it helped to bring him up to the scratch.” He laughed coarsely, but his laugh passed into a kind of growl. “I could have throttled the pair of them,” he said, with an oath, “but I thought better of it, and only threatened to spoil Lorry’s little game unless she drove me to the station.”

Was all this pure invention, the creation of an incorrigible and malicious liar? Could Mrs. Ingers have told me so frankly that Mr. Wood was waiting for her in the glen if there had been any guilty understanding between them? I remembered this, and remembered also with what transparent sincerity her eyes had met mine, and refused to believe her other than honest. I looked at her calumniator with disgust.

And yet, as I looked at him, I was struck with a certain pity. Could it have been that he was really in love with his cousin? His features



worked curiously when he boasted of how he had turned her secret to his own account. The hand holding his cigar dropped to his side, and for a moment a wistful look came into his eyes as he sat absorbed in thought.

The sound of carriage-wheels on the gravel outside roused him, and he started up with a very different expression of face from that which had occupied it a moment before. I had never seen such a look of intense and murderous fury. "I am a fool," he growled hoarsely. "If that carriage had not come, a hair would have turned me to board that yacht after all, and do for the two of them."

The butler entered to announce formally that the carriage was ready. He made the announcement with most obsequious politeness, but there was a certain tremor in his voice that made me look at him a second time. Roper was so discomposed that he walked out in surly silence without an attempt of leave-taking, at which I was not sorry.

But hardly had he gone from the room when the butler came in again with a very pale face, and ran up to me whispering, "excuse me, sir. Come to the window, here—here. Hush!" and he preceded me on tip-toe. "They are going to take him as he enters the carriage."

The carriage was drawn up in front of the porch. I had hardly time to notice two police-



men standing in wait when Roper stepped out and they pounced upon him.

But they were clumsy operators or nervous, and the alert and sturdy convict shook them off in an instant, and dashing aside the footman who held the door for him, sprang into the carriage. The policeman rushed forward after him as soon as they recovered their footing, but the next instant a shot was heard, and one of them staggered back while the startled horses set off at a gallop. The coachman, apparently aware of the plot, had been sitting with the reins rather loosely in his hands, and was in the act of turning around to see the fun when the horses bolted.

The frightened horses ran a good half-mile down the drive before the coachman recovered control of them. Thus Roper, who remained in the carriage, had a good start. We had the wounded policeman carried into the house, and a man despatched for the doctor, and then we gave chase, myself and two other policemen, and several of the farm hands.

We met the carriage returning, and learned from the coachman that he had never seen the fugitive, being too much occupied with his horses to look around till he had brought them to a standstill, by which time, doubtless, Roper was out and away.

Bearing in mind how savagely he had spoken of Mrs. Ingers and Wood, I directed the pursuit to-



ward the sea. It seemed to me most likely that his first thought would be to try to overtake them before they reached the yacht ; if he was tempted to attack them before, out of mere jealousy and disappointment, he would be doubly so now after his cousin had laid such a trap for him.

But when we came in sight of the sea no trace of him was visible. This was not much to be wondered at, for though the country was plain and treeless, the corn stood high, and what with it and stone dykes behind which he might skulk, there was abundant shelter for a fugitive of moderate cunning. The theory of the police was that he could not have got far from Garacraig without being seen, and that he was hidden somewhere among the trees in the glen, which they forthwith turned back to search.

As for myself I was more concerned for the safety of Mrs. Ingers than for the capture of the convict. The yacht still stood at anchor in the bay, a mile or less out from the shore, and I could see a boat making for it. Anxious to let them know that the plan had miscarried, and that Roper was still at large and keen for revenge, I ran down towards the beach waving my handkerchief with all my might. Whether they saw me or not I do not know ; but they took not the least notice. They weighed anchor as soon as the boat was hoisted on board, and stood southwards. But they might as well have let the anchor lie, for it was al-



most a dead calm; and when, despairing of attracting their attention, I walked back to see how the search was getting on, the yacht was still in the bay "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean."

I learned from one of the policemen the secret of the attempt to seize the convict. The idea was Wood's; it was he at any rate that had gone to the police-station, making his way there while Mrs. Ingers was up at the house with Roper, so that Roper was mistaken in thinking that Wood took him for Ingers. The suggestion made by Wood was that one of the policemen should get up as a footman, and that they should simply drive the convict to the prison instead of to the station, he knowing little of the country, and consequently not being able to know in what direction he was being driven. It was the unfortunate sergeant that had improved, as he thought, upon this plan, wishing to have the glory of capturing the convict, and thinking that he and his two men were equal to the job. The poor man paid for his conceit with a bullet wound in the shoulder, which kept him off active duty for several weeks.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## 'MID THE FURY OF THE STORM.

NEXT morning I was awakened by the rattling of the window-frames of my bedroom, and the dashing of rain against the panes. I looked out and found that a terrible storm from the east was raging.

One of the sights of the neighborhood was the sea in an easterly gale. The bay, or bight, on which the old church-yard lay, had a sandy beach; but, as I have already said, it was merely a break in the rocky coast-line—a smooth interval of not more than two or three miles in a very rugged shore. On both sides of the bay, north and south, were precipitous rocks, with deep water at the base, so that with an inshore wind the waves were dashed against them with great volume and force. Merely from the direction of the wind, I could have told that on such a morning as this the coast would be a magnificent spectacle for the lover of savage grandeur. But I was not left to conjecture; for when I rose and looked out from the bow-shaped dormer, I could see the spray rising many feet above the rocks, and forming a sort of flying white drapery all along the coast-line north



and south of the bay. I did not look long, for the rain on the glass made me shiver as if it were running down my back. I dressed with all speed, eager to be out and to make for the cliffs.

My eagerness for the spectacle was not, I fear, diminished by what I saw upon a more deliberate survey of the distant sea before I went down. There was a vessel in the offing, some distance out, but not far enough out to be safe in such a gale on a leeshore. Why there should be such a fascination in the spectacle of human creatures in deadly peril, is hard to say; but it is impossible to deny that there is such a fascination, however little it may be to the credit of those that yield to it.

I made a hurried breakfast, and started out. The wind and rain beat in my face with such violence that I was often fain to call a halt and take breath before breasting it again; and during one of those halts, as I neared the village, I became aware of a vehicle drawn by two horses tearing down the incline behind me. I recognized the wagon of the coastguard, and having known one or two of the men in my boyhood, I made bold to jump on behind, clamber up, reintroduce myself, and ask where they were going.

They were going to succor, if necessary, the vessel that I had seen. They came from a coast-guard station five miles to the south, and had followed her along the coast, observing the danger



of her situation. They had expected that the skipper would try to run her ashore on the sandy beach, of Garvalt Bay, there being to their experienced eyes very little likelihood that she would be able to weather Skateness, her only other chance of safety. But either the skipper did not know the coast, or he was sanguine of weathering this point, for, instead of making for the sandy beach, he had persisted in his offshore tack. The vessel had passed the bay before the wagon overtook me, and had disappeared behind the cliffs to the north; the coastguardsmen were now following her up with misgiving.

I asked if they knew what vessel it was. I asked carelessly, not supposing that it had any special interest for me beyond any other ship in distress. But the answer made my blood run cold. It was a yacht that had been seen the night before lying becalmed in Garvalt Bay, and that had sailed southward when the wind rose.

The coastguardsmen were driving their horses at a rapid pace as men whose presence or absence in the nick of time might mean life or death, but when I heard this I would fain have quickened their speed if it had been possible. We tore up the rising ground from the Garvalt valley to a point in the road from which the position of the yacht would be visible.

A glance showed us that her last chance of weathering the head was gone. She was not more



that half a mile, if so much, from the cliffs ; her sails had given way, and she was at the mercy of the waves.

We followed the road at the top of our speed, till we reached a point opposite to where the doomed yacht lay tossing and lurching and slipping out on the misty sea, the hull hidden at times by the spray that broke over it. The scanty soil was cultivated up to the very edge of the rocks, and the horses of our jolting wagon were urged through a grass field, straining, panting, snorting, dripping, right in the teeth of the wind and the drifting spray to within thirty yards of the frightful verge. A dyke of turf separated the ploughland from the narrow, irregular margin that was left for footpath along the edge of the cliff. Behind this dyke were congregated the men of a little fishing hamlet that lay in a hollow at the head of one of the numerous coves with which the coast was indented. Not till I came so near did I realize the full horror of the situation. The cliffs at this point were at least 150 feet high, a jagged, precipitous wall rising sheer from deep water ; but high as they were, the spray from the waves, driven against them with appalling violence and thundering roar, rose high above them into the air, and was caught by the gale and driven in drenching showers hundreds of yards inland. I peered over the cliff, and in an instant was caught full in the face by a gust and a deluge of



spray, and driven staggering back. I fell against the turf dyke, and one of the fishermen standing behind it caught my arm.

"Stand back a wee," he shouted in my ear, "and the wind winna touch ye. It hits the face of the heuch, and goes clean o'er our heads. Look!" And he gave a practical illustration of what he meant by tearing up a handful of grassy turf and tossing it over the edge of the cliff, where the wind caught it and whirled it back in a high semicircle over our heads.

I had forgotten this bit of cliff lore in my excitement. Somehow the comparative calm of this charmed semicircle, in which one stood as if protected by an invisible wall, intensified one's sense of the frightful hurly-burly of wind and roaring, seething water.

"There's little chance of saving them, I fear," I said.

"Varry little," was his answer. "They are in God's hands."

I looked down upon the shouldering crowd of huge waves beneath us, racing forward as if in furious contest for the first leap at the rocks, and over this wild surge to the yacht struggling desperately like a living thing forced in spite of itself doom, rearing, slipping, straining to this side and to that; and, as I looked, my teeth began to chatter.

The fisherman was more accustomed to such



scenes, but his weather-beaten face had not its natural color, and there was a moisture in his eyes beyond what the wind had brought into them.

"They've taken to the rigging, you see," he said. "That shows they've given up hope. That's a woman in the shrouds."

"Where?" I cried, my eyesight blurred by the wind and the rain, and thinking of Mrs. Ingers I had tried in vain to distinguish the figure of a woman on board.

"There, in the shrouds of the mainmast—lashed to them, I suspect. She's got a man's coat on her, but you can tell her by her hair."

"Is there no chance?"

"Well, that depends upon where she strikes, if she ever does strike, for she may founder any minute, the sea is so terrible high. If they could have run her into the bay now and beached her among the sand we might have done something for them, but these rocks—if she comes on them, they'll crush her like an egg-shell, and no mortal hand can save a soul of them. They shouldn't have tried to weather the head. And yet there's no saying but she might have done it if the sails had held, but you see they're in rags."

Three women had been attracted from the hamlet by the arrival of the coastguard, and they came up to the group on the cliffs with hair dishevelled and clothes flying about them, in a perfect



frenzy of compassionate terror. Their cries and gestures were most unnerving. We all turned to them for a minute, while their friends tried to persuade them to go home.

Suddenly one of them shrieked, "She's coming on! She coming on! Oh, poor things! poor things!" And all three turned and fled back distracted with terror and pity to the hamlet.

Gradually the yacht had been drifting nearer, and now a huge wave had lifted her up and bore her stem on towards the cliff. Several of us ran forward, and going down on hands and knees peered over the verge to see the last of the doomed vessel. It was a terrible moment. I fixed my eyes on the figure in the shrouds to which the fisherman had directed my attention, and as the yacht came on I could distinguish unmistakably the features of Mrs. Ingers. I could see her give one look of horror at the rocks, a look which I can never remember without a shudder, so ghastly was it in its supreme agony of shivering fear. Then she turned her face away. Mr. Wood was lashed to the shrouds beside her. His face was grave and pale, but he had not lost self-control.

A heavy gust of spray hid them for some seconds from my view. When it had passed I peered down again, expecting to see nothing but fragments of wreck. But to my surprise I saw the yacht plunging off the shoulder of a huge wave, violent-



ly thrown back seawards. Within a few yards of the cliff it had been caught by the recoiling water and flung back like a shuttlecock.

At the moment when the shower of spray intercepted my view, my attention had been caught by the frantic gesticulations of a figure in the cordage of the foremast. The wildness of his gestures had made me look at him, and what I saw made me look again as soon as the vessel reappeared with an interest that separated itself sharply from the grasp of the terrible scene upon my feelings. It was too far off for me, with my half-blinded vision, to discern the man's features, but the tonsure of the bare head and the clothes that he wore were enough for recognition: it was the convict Roper. In horrible contrast to the grave demeanor of every other soul on board the doomed ship, he seemed from his gestures to be raving mad: while he held on to the ropes with one hand and one foot, he flung his free limbs about in grotesque mirth, and I could see his teeth gleaming like the teeth of a snarling dog. From the way his head went he seemed to be yelling out words with great volubility; but whatever they were, they were lost in the fearful uproar of the surge.

I had no time to speculate as to how he came there. The whole horrible scene was so strange that I wondered no more at his appearance than if it had been in a dream.



I ran back again to the dyke and the group of fishermen and coastguardsmen to see whether the temporary respite of the yacht gave any hope of escape from ultimate collision. I put the question to them, but there was a general shaking of heads. Several of them looked to the man who had spoken to me before, and who seemed to be considered as an authority among them.

"She's near sure to strike next time," he said.

Several voices one after another agreed with "Ay, ay," and one added that it was a near thing last time.

"You see," resumed the first speaker, "if she's thrown off this heuch by the backwater, she's sure to be caught on the next, over there." He pointed to the cliffs on the other side of the creek some two hundred yards off, which jutted farther into the sea than the point where we were standing.

"But surely," I said, "if she runs into the creek there is some chance."

"Ay," said he, "if she keeps off the Tempen. But there's terrible little chance of her not striking the Tempen." The Tempen was a huge isolated peak of rock, nearly as high as the cliff, which stood almost in the middle of the narrow, V-shaped creek, near the top of it. The sea as it raced in ran up the sides of this rock with great fury: one shuddered to think of a vessel striking there.



There was nothing for it but to watch and wait the event.

Again the yacht, after rocking and pitching for a minute or two some hundred yards out, was borne forward right on the rocks, stem foremost. But again, when within a yard or two of destruction, it was flung back as before.

“The waves are just playing with her like a cat with a mouse,” said my fisherman. There was no levity in this homely comparison; his pale face showed how deeply he felt the horrible position of the poor souls on board, whose agonies were thus cruelly protracted. But indeed they seemed callous to their fate, too benumbed with despair to feel any thrill of hope even from these repeated escapes. All but the convict Roper, and it seemed as if life or death were a matter of indifference to him, for his mad gesticulations were as violent when the yacht came on as when it went heaving and rocking back.

The second escape of the yacht had been seen from the hamlet, and the same women who had been with us before again came forth, hurrying through the wind and rain in frenzied haste, stumbling along, blown almost off their feet by the fury of the gale. They were like the chorus to the tragedy, and no audience was ever more piteously thrilled than we were by the wails with which they reached us, wails so shrill that they pierced even the massive thunders of the storm.



"Eh, eh, it's awfu' wark this! Peer things, peer things, can naething be done."

Their coming seemed to make inaction intolerable, helpless as we were to rescue the unhappy victims whom the tyrannous sea was torturing to death before our eyes.

One fishermen suggested to the officer of the coastguard that he might shoot a line over the yacht when it came back, "just to show the poor fellows that we're thinking of them."

This compassionate idea was warmly seconded, and the rocket apparatus was quickly removed from the wagon and set up, all lending a hand. It was wonderful, too, how tongues were unloosed by the prospect of doing something, however forlorn the chance of any good coming out of it. We had been standing before in cold, shivering dread, dumb before the miserable spectacle; now one after another, as we bustled to be in readiness for the return of the yacht, gave expression to some hope or fear of what might be or regret over what might have been.

"She may come into the creek yet. She was nearer it the second time than the first."

"If we could have got a rope on her from the other side we might have warped her in."

"Na, na. Steam-power wouldna do it. The sea's o'er strong."

"But we might warp her off the Tempen, though."



“Whisht, whisht, here she comes.”

For the third time the yacht, after hanging for a little time uncertainly between the flood and the backwater, began to move forward on the cliff. On she came swifter and swifter. The coastguardsmen stood ready to fire their rocket, and we all waited breathlessly. Presently the loud hissing of the fuse blended with the noise of the storm, and with a roar off it went as a heavy blast of spray came sweeping on us from the cliff. When it had passed we dashed forward and peered over on hands and knees.

She had not struck, but was tossing back to sea again, rising, plunging, shaking, but still intact. But the line that we had shot! We had not made sufficient allowance for the height of the cliffs and the wind. The wind had caught it and swung it to one side, and the yacht must have passed under it. We could see it now depending from the cliff a little to the left of her backward course.

But had they seen it? That was almost of more consequence; for we had little hope of being able to do anything if we had hit our mark. Yes; the convict had seen it, and doubled his frantic laughter; the others also, and were looking up at the cliffs with a new interest in their faces, a look of doubtful hope.

The coastguardsmen prepared for another try, and shifted their position a little so that they might aim right in the teeth of the wind and over



the vessel as she retired, if she should escape being dashed on the rocks.

But this time, as the yacht began to move shorewards again, we could see that her direction was somewhat changed. She had been carried more to the left, and she had not gone more than twenty yards when we saw and recognized with an almost simultaneous shout that she was heading for the mouth of the creek.

Hurriedly the apparatus was replaced, and the driver sprang to his post and urged the horses towards the head of the creek, while we all rushed after the wagon in a body, the wind driving us on, stumbling one over another in our frantic haste.

The creek ran inland for a hundred yards. Its sides were precipitous, rising to the same height as the cliffs on the coast-line, but at the head of it the land sloped down to the water, a steep slope, but still a comparatively easy descent. If the yacht entered the creek and struck on this, which was grass-covered three parts down and shingle for the rest, there was a chance of saving life if the vessel did not go to pieces at once. If she struck the Tempen, the isolated rock of which I have spoken, all hope was gone.

She came in as if the ocean monster were tired of his cruel sport and had deliberately guided his victim, after he was tired of torturing it, straight for the place where there was a chance of safety.



By the time we had reached the head of the creek the yacht was well in the mouth of it, safe past the cliffs on either side. The sea rushed up the slope with such violence with each wave that we could not venture far down. The men with the rocket chose their ground on a sort of natural terrace near the top, and held themselves ready to fire as soon as she struck.

On the yacht came, straight as an arrow, making right for the end of the creek. A moment of intense suspense, and she passed the Tempen safely. Another moment of wild hope, and borne high on a gigantic wave she was shot forward as from a catapult, and ploughed shivering into the pebbly beach, while the water broke in spray over her stern, and the wave that had lifted her in came swirling to our feet. At that moment the rocket was fired, and went with a roar and a whiz over our heads.

The fate of more than one on board was decided in an instant. I had seen the convict, just before the ship struck, unloose himself from his lashing to the foremast, and run up the rigging like a cat, evidently with the hope that if the mast fell it would fall forward, and he might have a chance of scrambling up the beach.

It did fall, but sideways.

This accident proved fatal to the yacht's crew. They were collected in the rigging of the topmast,



and when it fell they fell with it into the surge, and were borne down with the receding wave.

But Roper was more fortunate. Exactly how it happened I could not clearly see through the flying foam and spray, but at the moment when the ship struck, he seemed to make a wild leap as if to clutch the rocket line, and, missing it, to fall within the bulwarks. When next I caught sight of his figure, he was holding on to the stump of the foremast, and seemed, from his contortions of pain, to have been badly hurt.

Mrs. Ingers and Mr. Wood were also left alive on the yacht, which, after a few oscillations, heeled over and lay on her starboard side, stuck sufficiently fast to keep her place and resist the rush of the backwater. They were fastened by a rope to the shrouds, and when the vessel swung over were brought almost to a horizontal position, lying on their faces against the cordage. Fortunately the line attached to the rocket had fallen on the side of the mast and had slid down to them. I saw Mr. Wood grasp it, and begin hauling it in with all his might.

If only the yacht did not slide back there was still a chance of saving them.

But while we bent our attention upon this chance, and some of our party began eagerly to pull the rope down from the station of the coast-guard to pay it out as easily as possible to him, suddenly one of the women whom I have already



mentioned, Elspet Lorimer by name, dashed down the slope after the retreating wave towards the yacht as if determined to rescue the survivors single-handed. A cry, half of admiration, half of fear, burst from us at this mad act of heroism. One of the men, her father, as I afterwards learned, shouted to her to come back, but she was at the yacht almost before he could articulate the words. Seeing that she did not or would not hear, he seized the two men next him, one in each hand, and indicated by a rapid gesture that we should form a chain down the slope. There was not an instant's hesitation in responding to his appeal, and in an incredibly short space of time we were all standing in line, linked hand in hand, fired by the woman's heroism.

It was a wild impulse on Elspet's part, a divine madness; but if any human creature could reasonably have counted on succeeding in the feat proposed, it was this brave fisherwoman. She was a woman of splendid physique, head and shoulders above the ordinary height of women, and powerfully built, with the peculiar erect carriage and nimble movement of her class. The women of the fishing villages along the coast are inured to the hardest work, and have sinews of iron; they do the carrying part of the trade, and they will walk and trot miles upon miles with loaded "creels" on their backs at a pace that would beat the strongest man in a hundred yards. Elspet



was an easy champion among these Amazons, renowned for her feats of strength and speed. When, therefore, she dashed down the slope, I felt certain that if any human creature, man or woman, could succeed in her daring attempt, Elspet would not fail, and I took my stand in the line with tears in my eyes and a wild hope in my heart that the brave woman would come back triumphant.

And come back triumphant she did. Fortunately, Mr. Wood kept his nerve and his presence of mind; and when the tall, sure-footed fisherwoman came leaping down the slope towards the yacht, he at once divined her purpose and quickly seconded it. One look at the ebbing tide, and he dropped the line at which he was hauling, and with a knife that he had fastened sailor-like to his waist to be ready for emergencies he cut the ropes with which Mrs. Ingers and himself were fastened to the cordage, and half-helped, half-lifted her to the ship's side. For an instant the lady hesitated to take the leap, and we were in despair for the brave rescuer as much as for her; but in another instant we saw her drop, and saw her caught in the strong arms of Elspet. Elspet caught her as lightly as if she had been a package of a few pounds, swung the burden on to her back, and raced up the steep shingle for her life. Not five seconds had she to spare, for as she passed the lowermost on our line, and we hurried up after



her, the returning wave caught us and swept us off our feet, and if man had not clung loyally to man as we sprawled on the slope, some of us would have paid for the rescue with our lives. But we had breath enough left to cheer when we saw Elspet drop her burden safe beyond the highest reach of the water.

Thus was Mrs. Ingers rescued. But Elspet's work was only half done. When she had placed the lady on dry ground, she never paused to take breath, but set her face again towards the yacht, eager for another rescue.

This, however, was not to be. The returning wave had loosened the yacht's hold upon the steep beach, and we turned only to see it sliding back into the gulf.

Something else, too, we saw, more horrible even than death by the cruel fury of the sea. As the yacht began to slip back, poor Wood seemed to conceive the idea of throwing himself over the side and taking his chance of scrambling up the beach. He would have been wiser to remain on board, when we might have rescued him afterwards if the timbers had held together. The back rush of the water was too strong for any man to make way against it. Still, this seemed to be his desperate hope, and we saw him clamber on to the bulwark as if with the intention of dropping over the side.

But at that moment an arm was thrust up from



the deck, and grasped him by the waist. Roper had been hidden from us after the yacht heeled over, but he must have contrived somehow to drag himself to where Mr. Wood was standing. The moment I saw the arm thrust up, I remembered the convict's hatred of his supposed rival, and gazed in horrible anticipation of the worst.

Not all the terrific uproar and confusion of the storm could quell the jealous man's murderous passion, and the sea itself was not more relentless. The tragedy passed in an instant. Wood had thrown his knife away, but his hand mechanically clutched the empty case at his belt. Even if the weapon had been there, he would have fared no better. Roper threw himself savagely and recklessly forward with all his weight and strength, and locking the unfortunate gentleman in his arms, fell with him overboard into the rushing water. And so they disappeared, as we stood horror-struck. I, only, knew the motive of the savage deed.

Mrs. Ingers was conveyed in a fainting condition, more dead than alive, to Garacraig House, and her husband was telegraphed for. The fright and exposure that she had undergone resulted in a fever, but she had strength enough left to battle through it. I left Garvalt before her recovery was assured; but a few weeks afterwards I received a letter from her, and at her request wrote at length to her husband to explain certain circumstances that had raised his suspicions and



threatened to disturb their domestic peace. Mr. Ingers was good enough in answer to say that my explanations were entirely satisfactory, and to thank me for them.

I called upon them afterwards in London, and casually learned from Mrs. Ingers how the convict Roper came to be on board the yacht at the time of the shipwreck. He had rowed out to them at night as they lay becalmed in Garvalt Bay, and had stolen on board, but not, as he believed, unobserved. The man on the look-out had seen his stealthy approach and given the alarm, and Roper had been quietly seized as he climbed over the side, and bound. They had released him to give him a chance for his life when shipwreck seemed to threaten them all.

Mrs. Ingers is now an active member of more than one charitable society. To this day I have never quite been able to make up my mind whether she was good or bad.

A short time ago, I attended a wedding. It was my cousin Mary's. Need I say that the bridegroom was one Dr. Errol?

































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